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THE MOST BELOVED WOMAN

The Prerogatives and Glories of the Blessed Mother of God

BY
REV. EDWARD F. GARESCHÉ, S.J.
Author of "Your Neighbor and You," "Your Interests Eternal," "Your Soul's Salvation," etc.

NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO
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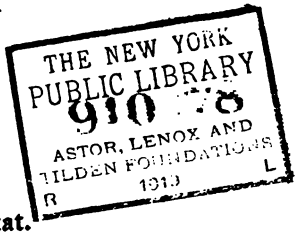

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Dedication

IT WAS YOU, MY EARTHLY MOTHER, WHO TAUGHT ME TO LOVE MY MOTHER IN HEAVEN, AND FROM YOUR OWN GOODNESS HELPED ME TO UNDERSTAND THE FAIRNESS AND HOLINESS OF MARY. BY YOUR HANDS, THEN, I OFFER THIS BOOK TO HER:

TO THE MOST BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
QUEEN OF ALL SAINTS

PREFACE

THESE papers, now published in book form, are not meant as a complete or systematic treatise on the Blessed Virgin. They do not seek to exhaust the inexpressibly rich and beautiful theme which they touch so occasionally and briefly. Rather they are pious meditations on certain of the prerogatives and glories of the Mother of God, first published from month to month in *The Queen's Work* and now gathered together in more permanent form because they have proved helpful to devout clients of Our Lady, who wish to have them at hand for occasional reading. The article on the prophecies appeared in the *Ave Maria.*

When one considers that the Blessed Mother is, after her divine Son, the most lovely object of human contemplation, it is rather strange that more has not been written in English in her praise. If this little book stirs a more ardent love of the holy Mother in its readers and makes them desire to read more of the Marian literature it will have

fulfilled its purpose. And while offering this small and wilted flower at the shrine of the Mother of God the writer hopes that some future time may bring him the opportunity of making a worthier tribute to the boast and glory of our mere human nature, the Most Beloved Woman, the dearest Mother of God.

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THE MOST BELOVED WOMAN

It is the blessed gift of every pure and holy woman to gather about herself the love of some devoted hearts. If her sphere is small, her true lovers will be few. If she is known far and wide, the circle will be larger, for her innocence and goodness will appeal to a greater number of loyal and impressionable hearts. But the circle of such devoted and unselfish worship can never be very wide, because the affection we speak of is not admiration, nor reverence, nor distant service—it is the sort of intimate, personal devotion which a son gives to his mother—a friend to his intimate friend.

True friendship cannot be maintained with a multitude. The constant give and take of benefits and love which it requires cannot extend beyond a certain few, or it would soon exhaust our limited powers. Friendship and devotion must be mutual to exist at all, and so even the purest and best of women gather to themselves in this inti-

mate and personal way of which we speak only a few devoted friends and lovers.

Yet, to every pure and womanly heart, these few loving friends, whether they be blood relatives, or brothers and sisters and sons and daughters of the soul, are inexpressibly dear. To help them and be aided by them, to confide in them and take their confidences, are the consolation of her life. Her loving solicitude goes out to them constantly, and she lives and plans and prays much more for her friends and unselfish lovers than for any merely personal end. They are her other self, more than the half of her heart.

Such thoughts bring us a little nearer, it may be, to realizing one astonishing and singular privilege of the Most Blessed Virgin. All the noblest prerogatives of her sex have been unutterably deepened and widened for her, and so, too, has this dear privilege of drawing and holding to herself the purest love of hearts. That intimate and personal devotion, that tender love of sons and daughters for their mother, of brothers and sisters for their sister, of friends for a most dear

friend, are all bestowed innumerable times over upon God's dear Mother. The love that she possesses from devoted hearts is deeper, truer, more enduring than any love of earth.

Indeed, the love we give to the Virgin Mary has borrowed the strength and fervor of every holy and unselfish human love. Men and women love Mary more because they love their mothers, sisters, friends. When grown men pray to her, there rises in their hearts a sweet, half-conscious remembrance of their own dear mothers, and this fond memory lends a tenderness to the thoughts of her. She has drawn to herself the charm and endearing sweetness of the pure love of all other mothers. They die, and their love would pass and be forgotten, did not the immortal motherhood of Mary draw to itself, and make perpetual, the strength and sweetness of the filial devotion of their sons and daughters.

Again, consider how the number of the devoted sons and daughters of Our Blessed Lady exceeds the narrow circle of any other pure and holy woman's friends. When she

declared "All generations shall call me blessed," she might well have said also, "and beloved." It is a very test of saintliness, to be an ardent lover of God's Holy Mother. The sweet name of Mary sings in the canticles of the Church, echoes in her liturgies, rings through all the exhortations of her saints, shines on her altars, glitters on her banners. She is written into great literature, woven into tapestries, painted into glorious pictures, built into cathedrals, and sculptured into stones. The world is sown, thick as the skies with stars, with lovers of Our Lady. Only think of the innumerable Catholic homes, scattered over the world, from the spot where you dwell to the uttermost borders of the earth. In every truly Catholic home the holiest name of woman, the sweetest memory of woman, is the name and memory of Mary.

But it should stir our hearts still more to dwell on the worthiness and power of this sweet and holy Virgin to attract and repay such measureless devotion. Other women cannot have more than a very limited circle of true friends. The reason is, as we

have said, that they cannot deal with more than a very few in the sweet give and take of confidence and affection which is the soul of friendship. But the Blessed Mother is as powerful as she is merciful and loving, as strong as she is holy and fair. The multitude of her sons and daughters does not confuse her, their endless petitions do not embarrass her, for she has unspeakable strength and power from God to be to all men truly a mother. The cries at her thousand shrines rise efficaciously to her great heart, that is made strong and tender to hear and grant them all. Our hearts soon weary of loving, because they are small and weak. The heart of Mary never wearies, because it was made by God Himself mighty and deep and wide to mother all mankind.

There are a thousand sweet consequences for each one of us from this blessed prerogative of Mary, of drawing to herself and repaying the intimate and personal friendship of all hearts. Not only are we most truly her friends and children—she is truly our friend and mother. We need never lack an intimate and devoted confidant, a tender

consoler, a compassionate and gentle advocate, so long as we have, all our own, the Blessed Virgin Mary.

When we feel utterly unworthy to approach her adorable Son, we may speak to Him through the Heart of Mary. When we are disappointed in earthly loves, we may be very sure of meeting no sorrow or distress where no one ever sought comfort in vain, or cried for aid without obtaining relief. When the death of others, whom we love, utterly casts us down, we may still turn to that immortal Mother over whom death has no empire, who has made us a place in her Son's eternal mansion, and keeps it for us, a true and faithful Mother, watching for our coming home.

Best of all, her love is not limited by our own hearts. Like all mothers, she loves us with a gratuitous and superabounding love —more than we ever shall deserve. This is the sweetest charm of friendship—of motherliness, and this exceeding love is found in no other woman's heart as it burns in the Heart of Mary.

We should always think of the Heart of

Our Blessed Mother as a heart intensely human in all that beseems a most pure and glorious humanity. Our own natures are human indeed, but with a humanity spoiled by the sin of Adam. The humanity of Our Blessed Mother is pure of all earthly stain. Yet none of the noble tenderness of our nature is foreign to her. She loves with a warm and generous emotion, and she desires our love in return as no other mother ever desired the love of her children. We should remember this when we think of Our Blessed Lady. She looks to us for tenderness, gratefulness, and service in return for her own undying and unsleeping love. Though she is Queen of angels and men, she is nevertheless still most truly a woman—the Woman of all women, who comes nearest in the tenderness of her mother's heart to the tenderness of the Heart of Christ.

Love and remembrance, reverence and service—from the little circle of her friends and sons and daughters these things are dear to the heart of every pure and holy woman. They are no less dear to the Most Pure Heart of Mary

And while we honor her as our *Queen* let us not forget that she would have our service no less than our petitions. Our Mother wishes indeed that we should cry to her in our distress—but she desires also to have part in our joys, our hopes, and our successes. She wishes to be part of our life, and to have her memory woven with our days, as through the life of a dutiful child there runs like a golden thread the love and service of mother. To murmur occasional prayers, to think devoutly of her now and then, on some especial feast—this is no fit service for a son or daughter of Mary. We must serve her as good and faithful children with actions even more than words. We must guess her wishes and desires and must anticipate, and with thoughtful love, what she would have us do for her dear sake.

It is not hard to guess what the Blessed Mother would have her children do at this especial time. The world is fainting away for want of a love and knowledge of her adorable Son. The poor—for whom she must feel such especial tenderness, because she was herself a daughter of the poor—are

in sore need and the prey to proselytizers and fanatics of many kinds. Their little ones, growing up in godless surroundings, greatly lack instruction in the faith. Truly, there is much work at hand to prove the truth of our tenderness and the sincerity of our devotion to the most lovable and loving of all women.

THE COMPASSION OF THE HEART OF MARY

IT WAS worthy of the infinite tenderness of God to come down in visible flesh and share our sorrows with us. We find it easy to believe in the compassion of Christ upon our miseries when we find Him suffering much greater things in His own innocent flesh. We know very well that the endurance of pain and sorrow brings a keener sympathy with others' sufferings, and so we carry our woes and griefs with complete confidence to Christ upon the cross. This is one of the many precious fruits of meditating upon the passion—it brings us a deeper, more trustful sense of Our Lord's compassion.

For the same reason it is well for us to dwell sometimes upon the trials of Our Blessed Mother. The thought of her afflictions will serve not only as an example to us, but as a proof of her compassion. We shall go to her in our distresses with all the greater confidence if we realize that she can sympathize with us with a vivid and tender

compassion because she also has suffered such like things.

Even though we had no positive testimony on the subject, we should have taken it for granted that Our Blessed Mother suffered a great deal during her mortal life. First of all, she was the most near to Jesus by nature, by love, by sympathy; and all who are near to Jesus must drink deep of His cup of suffering. His symbol is the cross, which stands for pain and contradiction; and who should be more deeply signed with the cross of Christ than His own Mother?

But a still stronger reason for being sure that Our Blessed Lady suffered beyond words during her mortal life is the unspeakable love and tenderest sympathy which bound her heart and soul to the adorable and agonized Heart and Soul of her Son. She was bound up with Him as no other mother was ever joined to child in sympathy and affection. Her heart, her feelings, her whole being twined round His Heart, and responded with inconceivable fidelity and sensitive sympathy and perfect compassion, to every tremor of pain or sorrow which

shook the fibers of His suffering Heart. We suffer with those we love in proportion as we truly love them and deeply realize their sorrow and affliction. The love of Mary for her Son was deeper than the ocean and her comprehension of His sorrows was sharpened by the threefold keenness of a Mother's tenderness, a Virgin's pure devotion, and the mighty grace of God which flooded her whole being with unbounded light.

She understood then—this Mother of Sorrows—as no other creature ever has understood, the sufferings of the Word made Flesh. She went far out with Him into the dark spaces of loneliness and yearning where His love pleaded for an ungrateful and betraying world. She yearned with Him over the soul of every sinner who ever flung away the friendship of God or spurned the grace of the blood of Christ. She pleaded with Him before the justice of the Father. She shuddered with Him at the gulf of hell and wept over the loss of souls. I can still remember when first it dawned upon me that all the calm and holy hours of Christ's life were pierced through with an all but unbear-

able agony because of the sinfulness and ingratitude of men. I struggled against the thought with earnest determination. It was too pitiful, to think that the Lamb of God was offered up in a life-long sacrifice by the passion and selfishness of men.

Yet who can doubt that Christ's entire life was full of acutest mental suffering? For the sight of a world hardened and steeped in sin was ever before Him, and He knew the whole depth and breadth of human wickedness. How could the Infinite Holiness but suffer, in the midst of such widespread evil? How could the Infinite Compassion but be distressed at so much misery? No one has come so near to realizing and repaying the wounded tenderness and yearning love of the Heart of Christ, as Mary. No one has gone so deep with Him into His desolation and sorrow, nor mourned so well with Him over His wayward race, as she who alone had no share nor part in their transgressions. These two most innocent of the race of Adam have suffered together the most appalling penalty of sin.

Again, we should remember in dwelling

on the sufferings of Our Lady that hers was a nature wonderfully perfect, delicate and sensitive to pain. It has been said of Our Lord that His human nature was of all others most capable of intense suffering because it was most perfectly organized, most keen and delicate in all its faculties, and the more perfect the organization, the greater its capacity for suffering. This same reflection holds, with due allowance, for Our Blessed Mother.

She too was, after Our Lord, the flower of humanity. She was the perfect stem who bore the Flower of Juda. She too was admirably perfect in her sensibilities and powers. She too had an immense capacity for pain. Besides, one may be sure that her own mighty and continual prayer prevailed ever to deepen and widen her sympathy with her Son. For what is more natural to a mother's heart than to desire truly to compassionate, to suffer with, her child?

Then, and this is an illuminating thought when we reflect on the sorrow of Our Blessed Mother, the affliction and the grieving of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had a power to wound

her heart beyond what any merely personal anguish could possess. She truly loved Him more than she loved herself—a triumph of grace and supernatural charity at which our poor and weak natures can but feebly guess. The love of Him utterly employed and, as it were, exhausted all the mighty powers of her heart, so that the center, so to speak, of her being was no longer within herself but in Him—in Him, her Creator, her Saviour, and her Son.

She suffered more then—this most loving Mother—in His woes and sorrows than she could have suffered in any merely personal afflictions of her own. The wounds that pierced His body in His awful passion, first agonized the deepest and dearest places of her heart.

That pale, silent woman, who walked so bravely near the bleeding form of Christ, when His disciples left Him, and who stood with such unfaltering strength near the cross, where He hung dying, was really bearing an intenser grief, a more oppressive and excruciating agony, than any personal wounds or pain could ever have inflicted on her. She

cared nothing for herself. She thought nothing of herself. Indeed, the sting of wounds, the throbbing of physical pain, would have been, in some sense, a relief for her, wounded as she was in the most tender and sacred sensibilities of her being.

She would have felt it a relief and joy to die for Him and repair in some sort our atrocious cruelty and hardness to Him. She would have rejoiced, as the martyrs did in their prisons and in the flames, to ease her great love by some great physical sufferings. But the relief of physical pain was denied her and she suffered only the agony worse than death of a mother who watches helplessly the anguish of her son.

Not lightly does the Church give to this Most Beloved Woman the name of Queen of Martyrs. For all other martyrs confessed their God in the anguish of a physical agony and death, but the Mother of God died many times over in spirit, in that extremest anguish which pierced her quivering soul and crucified her heart.

With what complete and tender confidence, then, with what simple trust may we

not seek the compassion of Our Blessed Mother! Kind beyond conceiving, by nature and the grace of God, her heart has besides been made more tender still in the fiercest fire of tribulation. It has become more compassionate than any other merely human heart, by bearing more exquisite sorrows and experiencing more agonizing depths of pain. If any mother's heart knows compassion, or can feel for the needs of her children, it is the stainless heart of Mary.

Now and again, even in our ordinary days, one comes upon some heroic woman who has borne the fierce trial of an excruciating sorrow, and come forth from that fiery ordeal strengthened and purified. And what depths of human kindness and compassion—what strength and peace and tenderness such a proved soul displays toward those who seek her for consolation! Suffering, nobly borne, has some admirable virtue which ripens the better instincts of the heart as the summer heat ripens the grain.

If sorrow can do so much even for the lowlier daughters of Eve, what blessed fruits of tenderness and compassion have not her

great dolors ripened for us in the heart of Mary? Let us bring all our needs and griefs, then, with utter confidence to our most compassionate Mother. In all else, the heart of the Most Beloved Woman is the faithful mirror of the Heart of Christ. Her compassion, too, deep, motherly, and tender, is nearest to the boundless tenderness and sweet compassion of the Word made Flesh.

THE MOTHER'S HEART OF MARY

We are all of us, in the eyes of God, as little, helpless children, and we need a mother. He has considered our weakness and our want from the beginning, and has provided for us the one elect and perfect woman who can be a mother to all mankind. Thus in this, as in all things, the Infinite Mercy has had a care for our necessities. He made us and knows that we are weak and naked and poor, and that we want constant mothering. True, we have each of us, when we are tiny babes, our own natural mother; but, despite the mighty instinct of motherhood that God has planted in every woman's heart, there are many mothers that have no skill to guard and train their children, others who are wicked and will not, and others still whom death prevents before they can accomplish what they would. For these neglected babes God has given a universal Mother.

And we others, who have grown up in

the shelter of a mother's love, whose youth was sanctified by that pure and hallowing influence, we also find, when we come out into the world, that we still need a mother. There remain in us, even until extreme old age, even until death, yearnings and weaknesses, and needs for comfort and intercession that make us crave, unconsciously and blindly it may be, for some spiritual mothering; and it is befitting, therefore, that God, who has deigned to illustrate for us His own great love by comparing it to the love of a mother, should provide for all mankind by His omniscience and all-power a Mother great enough to cherish all her race, and loving enough to give every mortal, without exception, the intimate care and personal affection of a mother.

It was a task that only All-Wisdom could conceive and only Omnipotence could accomplish. Consider the unthinkable diversities of men. Remember the flowing millions that pervade the earth, swarming in every land, pouring from age to age in incessant and ever-changing variety, countless and bewildering, many as the sands of ocean,

different as the flowers of summer, with needs and aspirations and wants and cares that it would seem only the knowledge of God could compass and only the heart of God could pity or even understand. What a more than angelic intelligence is needed to comprehend and to remember the needs and petitions of so many! What a more than seraphic love is required to intercede for the pardon and help of this clamorous and bewildering torrent of mankind, sweeping forever from the seething springs of birth to the misty ocean of death, pouring through so many channels, and filling the air with the voice of so many cries! There are on earth at this day no less than sixteen hundred million souls. Every day a hundred thousand babes are born, and nearly a hundred thousand men and women go to doom. Even the contemplation of such gigantic figures dazes the mind. Can there be any woman, on earth or in heaven, so wise that she can comprehend and keep in her mind the needs of so many souls, and so good and great of heart that she can mother, with individual and persistent care, these many needs that

our littleness cannot even conceive or understand?

If we set ourselves to consider the nature of a mother's love, the marvel increases that any woman can be all mankind's true mother. A mother's love is extremely special, particular and exclusive. Its very intensity, solicitude, and depth of feeling confine it, for most women, to their own immediate offspring, and one even finds in a family of many children that the mother's heart is sometimes too narrow to love them all equally, and what she gives in strength of affection to one is in a certain sense taken from another. How can one woman, then, be a mother to all the world? She needs a heart that is equal, in the capacity of its comprehension, the tenderness of its care, and the sublime and surpassing talent for loving, to all the mothers' hearts of all the earth. She needs much more; for whereas not all the mothers of the world do really love and cherish their children, this Mother of all mankind must, out of her heart, supply for all the sad mothers who are so only in name, and have not a mother's heart.

Considering all these things, and striving to comprehend the vastness of the human race, its pitiful need, and the meaning of a mother's love, one might have questioned whether it was in the nature of things that one woman could be mighty enough and kind enough to take upon her sole self the task of mothering the world, and have a heart so wide as to embrace all mankind. But God has answered the question by making such a woman, and by giving her such a heart; and the name of the woman is Mary, the Mother of God, and all men's Mother.

God does all things easily, and the greatest to Him is even as the least. Otherwise one might have piously imagined that in His planning of the universe He dwelt longest, after the Heart of Christ, upon the Heart of Mary. Her Heart is the masterpiece of all creation, after the Heart of Christ. And it matters more to us than we ever realize, how perfect and complete God made the mother's heart of Mary. Whenever God gives an office to any one He usually gives the talents and natural gifts that are needed for the perfect fulfilment of what He wishes.

This is what one would expect from His wisdom and His goodness. Indeed, so true is it that God fits us specially for whatever special task He vouchsafes to give us, that when there is question as to whether such a one has such and such a special vocation—as, for instance, a vocation to the religious life—the first question to be asked is this: Has he the gifts of nature that are required to fulfil the duties of that state? For if God has not provided the gifts, then it is usually clear that He does not give the calling. We may thus be sure that in ordaining the Blessed Virgin to be the Mother of all men He has also given her a heart that fits her to be all men's true Mother.

How vast and deep are her affections, how sensitive her sympathy, how immense her compassion, and how prompt her kindness and her mercy, all generations have witnessed when they have called her blessed, not only for the gifts she has received, but for the use she made of them. We can, therefore, sum up the greatness of the heart God gave her by saying that He made her heart to mother all the world. Then we may ponder

for a lifetime on the meaning of these words and never exhaust their immense significance.

What a heart must be the heart of Mary! What words will bear the strain of striving to express the strength and sweetness of that heart, and not break down and lose their significance because they are bidden to say things inexpressible beyond their reach. When in the light of prayer the saints have been so happy as to fathom in some degree the heart of Mary, their joy has found expression, not in words, but in speechless ecstasy. It is her heart that has made her mightiest among all the sons and daughters of Adam—greatest of all mere creatures, and most prevailing both with God and with men.

The power of our human nature is in the heart. The will with its handmaids, the affections, rules all creation, and is mighty with both earth and heaven. More than by interest or by fear the world is ruled by love, and it was this consideration that moved the Son of God, when He would conquer the world perfectly and forever, to put aside the glory of His divinity and the splendor of

His riches and come among us as one of ourselves, drawing to Himself all Adam's children with the cords of Adam. So the strength and sweetness of her motherly heart are the great sources of Mary's power over her children. She rules us as a mother, by the love of her heart.

The history of men is in great measure the history of their hearts. If we know any one's heart, we know also his inmost history. But in the case of most human beings it is exceedingly difficult to obtain a knowledge of their hearts. The heart is interior, secret, and deep; and it manifests its mysterious workings only by those exterior actions which it is sometimes so hard to interpret rightly and which disclose so grudgingly the very things perhaps that we most need to know in order to form a just and fair notion of the heart. This is true even of the simplest and least educated of mankind, and as one ascends in the scale of intellect and training it becomes increasingly difficult to gain an intimate knowledge of the heart. The men and women who have left the greatest impress on history are often but little known

to us, because we cannot fathom the deep recesses of their hearts. The secret of their power is somewhere contained in the hearts that they kept concealed. We can never comprehend them now, because they have left behind them no story of their heart.

On the other hand, even the most gifted in self-expression, the poets and the artists who were able with keen power to set their hearts out to be seen by men, have not succeeded in giving us all we need, to know their hearts intimately, because, for one thing, they did not know themselves. In the moments of supreme inspiration in which they conceived their masterpieces of expression they were rapt out of themselves and builded better than they knew. But the secret of their hearts is hidden from us. Indeed, it were rash for us to think that we know them at all, save only as their works tell us of a passing mood or an incidental thrill of beauty. The secrets of their hearts have died with them and are lost to us.

But, most happily, and in some sense amazingly, it is not so with the heart of the Most Beloved Woman who is our Mother.

Though we have only one small poem of her composing—the Magnificat—and only a few words and actions of her life recorded in the Sacred Scriptures, we know more, and more surely, concerning the heart of the Blessed Mother than about that of any character in history save only Our Blessed Lord. For by thinking all that the Heart of Mary should be, we know at once all that she truly is in her most pure and blessed Heart. She was full of grace on earth, and is so in heaven. She never in any respect whatever departed by a hair's breadth from the law of God. She is the ideal of Christian goodness, of perfect motherliness, of holy virginity, of perfect charity toward God and men. To know what her heart was and is we have therefore only to ask ourselves what it should be.

One could spend many happy hours thinking with assurance and delight of the Heart of the Blessed Mother. What love of God is there, and what tenderness for ourselves! Think of the goodness, the piety, the faithfulness of a mother's heart, and then strive to measure the affection toward you in par-

ticular that glows in the heart of your Heavenly Mother. Strain your conceiving to picture her care over you and the interest she takes in all your affairs, the attention she gives to your prayers, the solicitude with which she watches over all your ways, and then think to yourself that you have fallen far short of doing justice to the heart of that most perfect and faithful Mother. We owe gratitude to God for many things. We can never understand, much less repay, His bounties to us. It will be one of the keen joys of heaven to acknowledge and thank Him more and more for the goodness He has showered upon us. And in that clear and joyful revelation, when we see with God's eyes and are enlightened with His understanding, one of our most exquisite delights will be to comprehend in our measure the heart of our Mother, and to render to God eternal praise for this, after His own divine Son and the Holy Spirit, the greatest of His gifts to men.

OUR PART IN THEM

CHRISTMAS time is a season of gifts. It should be also a time of earnest gratitude. On that great feast we commemorate the supreme gift of the Godhead to our human nature, in the Incarnation. We should do well to try to realize thankfully how much God gives us, when He gives us Jesus and Mary.

It is said—you have heard it often—that the whole universe of God is so delicately linked and welded together, that whatever touches the tiniest part affects in some way the entire whole. A step on a grassy meadow sends a thrill to the farthest star!

If this is true in the world of matter, it is tenfold true in the world of spirit. We are all members of a harmonious and delicately linked and welded system, and the good or evil of one of us reacts upon the welfare of us all.

Men often go to heaven or to hell together and hand in hand. The influence of one of us upon the other is only measurable by God.

If you prayed more, lived better, your neighbor would be heartened to follow, and God would give him more grace for your sake. Indeed, our acts are as far reaching as the world of souls. The hordes of China are better off, or worse, according as you have prayed for or forgotten them. Even the joy of the angels is in some way increased by your good actions. Your goodness or your wickedness delights or grieves the very heart of Christ Himself.

We matter tremendously, then, we little-seeming mortals, to one another. We give and take example, influence, and intercession. And it follows from this mutual influence that God's gifts to each one of us are in some sort given to us all.

This is true even in the intellectual order. The fiery passion, the swift, tremendous power of creative imagination which God gives to geniuses and poets, enrich the whole world with noble and imperishable works. But in the order of grace, it is doubly true that God's gifts to one are gifts to all. Every saint has left the whole world a better place than he found it. His prayers have saved

and his example leavened numbers of men. The graces that God gives us are never for ourselves alone, they are to have a wider influence than for our own perfection merely. We never become better ourselves without bettering some one else as well.

Pondering on this truth will bring us to realize how kindly and generously God has dealt with us through the ages, in raising up for us a host of saints. We are the heirs of those great servants of God. We enjoy the fruits of their sufferings, the benefits of their prayers, the help of their intercession. They have blazed a path wherein we may follow. God's gifts to them have worked for our sanctification too; His favors to them have also been favors to ourselves.

These thoughts prepare us to appreciate somewhat more deeply (there are deeps beyond deeps of thankfulness that we can never fathom) the unthinkable kindness which God has done to us in enriching beyond all measure the sacred humanity of Christ and the pure heart of His Most Beloved Mother. He has indeed given them incomparable gifts, but they themselves are

His gifts to us. No gift of God to the Divine Humanity, no fulness of grace which He poured into the brimming chalice of Mary's soul, but it has been the cause to us of unspeakable blessings. The fulness of their holiness redounds to our sanctification. They are made great and holy, not only for their own sake, but for the sake of all mankind.

This truth is made most clear when we consider the adorable humanity of Christ. He is the author of all grace, and its springhead. In creating that perfect humanity, and at the same time ordaining that it should be from the first instant united to the Word of God, the Heavenly Father gave us our High Priest and our Victim—the Saviour and Redeemer of us all. Through that individual human nature the Word linked His adorable person with all humanity, and though of but one man it may be said that He is also the Eternal God, yet we may each one say that our human nature has been honored above all the angelic choirs by being assumed by the Eternal Word. Thus the supreme gift of God to humanity is a gift

to every one of us, and all the stupendous favors which were heaped on that human nature by consequence of its assumption by the Word were in a true sense given to us all. It was for us, for each of us, that the Word became Flesh. It was for us that He was made the First-Born of the children of God, and dwelt amongst us.

This should form a subject of long and loving meditation for us, during the days that follow Christmas, as we tenderly recur in thought to the sweet and tiny Babe on the bosom of His Mother. He Himself is the supremest Gift of God. But every good and perfect gift which God's boundless love lavished and heaped upon His human nature, was but another gift bestowed on us. We also are the beneficiaries of every prayer that stirred His lips. We are the heirs of all His burning love, His prayers and merits and sufferings. The mark of all our sins is upon Him. But upon us is the mark of all His holiness!

When we turn from the Divine Babe to look upon the gentle Mother, we should strive to realize how all the gifts God heaped

upon her great and holy heart were also bounties to ourselves. For as in Jesus He was preparing a Saviour and a Brother for all men, so in Mary He was making for us all a Mother. After Christ, she is God's greatest gift to us. Each gift of God to her was given through her to all humanity.

It is sometimes said that God's greatest gifts are His most universal ones. The air, the earth, the sky, life, in the physical order, and in the spiritual order, grace, heaven, and the love of God, are offered to all men. So, too, these most perfect gifts of God's creation—the sacred brotherhood of Christ, the holy motherhood of Mary, are offered with supreme generosity, to all mankind.

But it depends upon our own zeal, fervor and good will, whether these gifts of God shall come to us in greater or in less perfection. The Child appeals to us, the Mother smiles upon us. They besiege our hearts with gentle violence to follow them along the way of purity, holiness, self-sacrifice, and the surpassing love of God. They are not respecters of persons. It matters not to Jesus and to Mary that we are poor, despised, for-

gotten of the world; they still invite us to their intimate friendship and call us to their fellowship and service. Rather, they choose the poor and the forsaken lot as they did in Nazareth. But it rests with our own free choice to take part with them or no. We must all become poor in spirit to follow the Child and His Mother. Their love is as free and universal as the air, as generous as the sun, as wide as earth. What part we have in them depends on our own choosing, on the free inclination of our will. Even of the sun, and air, and earth a man cannot always have as he chooses. But in Jesus and in Mary, in the heaven He wins for us and the grace she conveys to us, in the example He affords us and the intercession she bestows on us, we can partake as widely as we choose.

There are no limits to God's power; there are no bounds to the good gifts we may have from Jesus and from Mary, save our own free will. The tales of the East are full of the magnificence of those opulent monarchs, who dealt about to their subjects the overflowing riches of their barbaric pearls and

gold. Their own sweet will was the only limit to their bounty. Their treasuries were inexhaustible—full of the savings of their nation for century after century. They gave a province as though it had been a field—a king's ransom as though it were a bauble.

But there came to the East a King who outdid in wealth and generosity the wildest dreams of these spendthrift kings. He promised each of His subjects a kingdom. His bounty was confined, not by His own sweet will, but by the will of any one who should beseech Him. He dared to say (as even the richest of those lords of earth had never ventured) "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." An appalling promise, and one which is possible to omnipotence alone. Since Christ is the Eternal Truth, He meant this promise most sincerely. Since He is the Eternal Faithfulness He will fulfil it to the letter. We may have as great a part in Jesus and Mary as we will ask of them.

Of course we must ask not with our lips only, but with our mind and our heart. We

must truly will to have a part in Jesus and Mary, and the greatness of our part in them will depend upon the earnestness and sincerity of our will. We must take them as they are and desire to be like them. They are poor in spirit and suffering in body. They are chaste and meek and kind and lowly, and they hold the world as nothing in comparison with the love of God and the kingdom of heaven. When we desire sincerely to have a part with Jesus and Mary we must sincerely desire these things also. We must desire to be unworldly, to love our fellowmen, not some of them merely, as the pagans do, but all of our fellow-men. We must desire to take God's part against the world, to suffer persecution for justice' sake, to bear wrongs patiently, to be peacemakers, to be clean of heart. And we must will all of these things with a true, sincere, actual, honest purpose, not merely with the impulse of transient feeling or with the passing sigh of devotion. It is the will which God looks to when we pray. We must ask with all our will in order to receive a part in Jesus and

Mary. We must keep a steady and constant will in order to retain our part in them.

But it is worth our while, immensely worth while, to go to any pains or make any sacrifice in order to have a part with Jesus and Mary. For, little and slight as they seem, outcasts in the stable of Bethlehem, forsaken of the world, and great and powerful as the world seems, which has cast them out of its inns and will not take part with them, yet Jesus and Mary are strong and mighty and enduring, and the great world is weak and fickle and passes like a dream. We may gain a great part in the world and within fifty years we shall find the world slipped from us, and our hands will be empty, but the part which we gain in Jesus and Mary we shall possess as long as God is God.

Not for our own selves only should we desire to have a great part in Jesus and Mary. For as they are God's greatest gifts to us and all of God's gifts to them redound to our profit, so may we become gifts and blessings of God to our fellow-men and all God's graces given to us will redound to

our brothers' benefit as well. Just in proportion as we become like to Jesus and to Mary, so shall we be able to give to other men and women a part in Jesus and Mary, to win the world to them by our example, and help it by the graces which we merit. To a generous soul this should be one of the strongest motives to strive for a great part in Jesus and Mary. We must become like to them before we can lead others to their feet. We must know the way ourselves to the stable at Bethlehem before we can bring others there. The shepherds, the Magi, went first themselves before they spread the good tidings abroad. When a man finds a great treasure, he may indeed call his neighbors to share it with him, but he will first take a share himself. If he does not care to possess it, his neighbors will never believe that he has found anything worth caring for.

The love of God, then, and the right love of ourselves, and the love of our neighbor, these three loves, which embrace all worthy love, urge us most strongly to gain a mighty part in Jesus and Mary. Let us think these thoughts over many times during the Christ-

mas season, and at every sacred season. Let us haunt with a holy longing the little cave of Bethlehem. We need not speak many words nor say striking or moving things to Jesus and Mary. The desires of our hearts will speak for us. We need only let our true wills yearn long and earnestly to have a great and lasting part in the Child and His Mother.

HIS MOTHER'S EYES

Not long ago, on the train, I chanced to see a mother with her baby in her arms. It was beautiful to remark the intense affection of her look, as she gazed at the tiny face. Her whole soul was in her eyes. Then I thought of the unwearying devotion with which this mother's eyes would follow the growing child through all its years. She would watch every slight action, notice every sign of growth or change. Nothing which concerned her child would ever be indifferent to her, for this was her very son, dearer to her than her own life.

So one was enabled, seeing the rapt worship of this mother's eyes, feebly to conjecture how the eyes of the Most Beloved Woman fed upon her Baby, as He lay in her arms, as weak and unregarded of the world as this small babe before me. How well the Virgin Mother watched her Son! Nature and grace were so perfect and so admirably blended in her! The very maternal tenderness that fastened her eyes upon

Him, and made her heart beat faster for every budding charm that the days unfolded in His tiny face, was a source of grace to her. For to watch Jesus and imitate Him is the sum and epitome of all the wisdom of the saints, and who would ever watch Him so nearly or so well as this Most Beloved Woman? She was His Mother and His Daughter. She watched Him with the all-observant eyes of a mother and imitated Him with the fidelity of a dutiful child.

We may in fancy steal reverently in upon one of those peaceful days of which there were so many at Nazareth. The quiet morning has seen that dutiful housewife going through all her lowly tasks with the diligence of an angel and the love of a seraph—her body most active in God's outward service, her soul entirely intent on His interior love and adoration.

Now the poor place is swept and garnished, the water-jars are filled from the well, the floors and the walls shine with cleanness, the poor sticks of furnishings are ranged duly in decent order in the room.

And all the while as her busy hands ply

their task—O most admirable work-woman, sweet dignifier of the toil of millions of Eve's poor daughters!—the Mother's eyes have been upon her Son. She has the mother's art of watching Him at all times, anywhere, in any occupation. Her eyes turn to Him, as certain flowers seek the sun, with a wistful, tender, thirsty fondness, that drinks Him in, whenever she can steal an instant glance from the work her hands are doing. And in those brief instants when her tasks take her from the Presence, the eyes of her heart fix themselves with even greater intentness upon the Son of her heart and the Father of her soul.

Her work to her is Jesus, her rest is Jesus. The quiet world, and soft sky, the voices of the birds, the mild looks of little flowers, the lambs, the sheep, that pass her doorway, the green hollow of the hills about Nazareth, the wistful distances that stretch away toward His town of Bethlehem and His city of Jerusalem, the very round circle of the world which He has planned and made, all cry and whisper and sing to her "Jesus, Jesus," the livelong day, and day after day,

from morning to sunset. The stars of heaven spell His name across the firmament. Her eyes only seek those shining mysteries to be reminded of His power and glory. Their glance hastens back to where the Babe is sleeping on her bosom, to read His gentleness and love.

Always, at all hours, for years upon years, the Most Beloved Woman had before her eyes—mother's eyes—the great object-lesson. She saw open before her, in the very flesh, the text-book of holiness and perfection. And she studied Him, not only with her mother's eyes, but with her mother's heart.

We ourselves may well yearn, with the most intense desire, to have been given one glance at that heavenly Child. The very look of Him had an almost sacramental efficacy to pour the grace of God into our soul. One such glance would burn itself with a sweet pain into our memory, and set us yearning for the everlasting look which we shall fix upon Him in heaven. Yet how poor and weak is our devotion beside the motherly and virginal love which kept the eyes of Mary

upon the Word made Flesh. She studied Him with her mother's heart.

For sympathy and comprehension there is no equal to a mother's love. The look she bends on her son is edged with a twofold keenness of comprehension—her yearning affection, and the resemblance between her own heart and her child's. Her love makes her desire to comprehend him. His likeness to her, makes comprehension easy and deep. He has inherited from her everything but his soul, and even his soul, profoundly affected by its union with the body, becomes by that very fact attuned to hers. This wonderful thing, true of all sons and mothers, was in an especial manner true of this Mother and her Child. For she was His only parent upon earth. She was His only tie with the children of Adam. All the resemblances which linked His human nature with His race, came to Him through her pure self. Never was there closer resemblance between son and mother than this Most Beloved Woman bore to her Son, who is God.

So her heart was endlessly competent to study and understand Him. She could con-

jecture, with the swift sureness of a mother, the motions of that tiny Heart which is greater than the earth, and hear, in deepest rapture, the wordless language which spoke to her out of His infant silences. One look from Him had an eloquence to her which almost overpowered her heart, so rich and various were its messages. She understood her Son perfectly and imitated Him completely. This is the whole story of the Most Perfect Woman who ever lived on earth.

What sets us wondering most is the extreme simplicity of saintliness as practised by Jesus and Mary. It does not consist in multiplied devotion, though all the great devotions of the Church were practised sublimely in that little household, the devotion to the Sacred Heart, to Mary and to Joseph. It does not lie in perplexing and head-fatiguing observances, nor in agonized self-examination, nor in terrific penances, though the Blessed Mother was the soul of fidelity, humility, and mortification. But her sanctity, like that of her Son, was the perfection of fidelity and love, in the small things of every day. She studied the God in flesh

from His tender babyhood, and discerned that His whole will was to do the will of His Father in heaven. She learned that to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, when the Father willed it, might be raised by the intenseness of the heart's love to as great and meritorious an action as to lie meekly upon the cross when He decreed.

She learned to despise the wisdom of the world. The world, if it had known that God was on earth, would have called upon Him to walk abroad in majesty and power glorifying Himself above the princes of earth. It would have bidden Him lose no time in setting about His career and establishing His kingdom. She saw her Son peacefully delay for nearly all His lifetime, leading His carpenter's life, a laboring man, straining at the coarse wood with tired muscles, and gripping with His calloused hands the rude tools for hewing and sawing, hacking and shaping the plows and benches of the poor.

She saw the Almighty use His human strength to weariness, in the most obscure work that He could find in Israel. The striplings of the great families of Juda were

crowding the schools of the law, to become scribes and Doctors in Israel. Christ, the Son of God, spent His youth toiling like Adam, and watched and loved by Mary.

She learned the greatness of little things. When He came in from His rough work, His hands soiled with it, His body tired with it, the sweat of toil on His forehead where the majesty of God abode almost visibly, her heart must have leaped, again and again, with a wonder that no use or custom could allay. She knew so well who He was that lived under this rough garb of a peasant of Palestine. She realized, with a dizzy clearness of realization, who this was, what Person looked through these calm eyes, and spoke with these parched and sun-burned lips. From long and loving meditation, the keen splendor of the Divinity, that Eternal Wonder, that exquisite Perfection, that infinite Realty who is God, shone on her soul through the thin veils of flesh. The keenness of her mother-eyes almost pierced through into the Divinity. She almost realized, even in the flesh, the sweetness of the Look which is Heaven.

And this Person, this Presence, this Awe and Splendor, had been all the morning about what task of tremendous import and majesty? What had this Heavenly Wayfarer found to do, which was worth His tremendous overleaping of all the choirs and thrones and principalities of heaven? He had come forth from inaccessible light and travelled the unmeasurable distance from the infinite to the finite, to find—what godlike task for His human hands to do? Even her comprehending heart must have fainted to conceive it. He had been toiling all morning and for many mornings, in the most obscure place of the most despised nation of the world, doing work that would not overtax the mind or skill of the simplest and meanest of day laborers. He was doing His Father's will.

It was a strange and heavenly wisdom, that Mary gathered, watching her Son's hidden life of toil and lowliness. It was a new model of holiness and fidelity that Son displayed, day by day for thirty years, before His Mother's comprehending and adoring eyes!

THE VIRTUE OF THE MOST BELOVED WOMAN

WE WEAK and sinful mortals find it very hard to value aright the perfect and excellent virtue of Jesus and Mary. Our days are spent in wars with foes within as well as without us, and we cannot imagine their perfect mastery of their hearts. Our lives are a series of fallings and risings, of good resolves and inadequate fulfillments, and so it is impossible for us to understand the calm, strong course of their even and flawless virtue. We go about, even the heroes among us, with many a scratch and scar, to tell of the varying fortune of battles, and so we come in time almost to measure virtue by wounds. The conflicts of Jesus and Mary were all glorious victories which left them clean of any scars, and such superhuman sinlessness tempts us half to doubt the realness of their conflicts, and to underestimate the glory of their victories.

We are like those men of the woods, who live in constant bickerings and always sleep

with weapons within grasp of their fingers. Their battles are written all over their scarred and mutilated bodies. How can they appreciate the valor of the civilized soldier, who goes through long campaigns, and does not bear a single mark of strife?

This is a great pity and loss for us, not to realize the splendid virtue of these two perfect models of mankind. For the truth is, that Jesus and Mary were not only the most perfect of all human beings, but they were also the most deeply tried and solidly proven of all heroic souls. Their stainless innocence and most splendid sanctity were not the guarded goodness of a child in its father's house. They were the tried worth of a hero of many wars, who is still so expert of arm, so dauntless and resolute of will, as to beat back a thousand fearful enemies without sustaining one solitary wound.

Let us think lovingly for a moment of the virtue of Mary. For, as she is the perfect reflection of the virtue of her Holy Son, so in speaking of her we shall be telling His glories too. And, being a reflection, her

goodness is less blinding and more intelligible than His. Our astronomers study the sun's bright disk through darkened glass when they cannot bear to turn their eyes on the burning orb itself.

First of all, Our Blessed Mother had not, it is true, the fierce internal wars and struggles to contend with that vex our flesh and spirit since the sin of Adam. She did not sin in Adam, and so she was spared those shameful temptations, those interior rebellions which torment the most of mankind. Besides, it was not fitting that God's most pure Mother should suffer the indignity of such assaults of hell. But this exemption from the rebellions of the flesh does not diminish the pure glory of the Blessed Mother.

We grow so used, as we have said, to measuring virtue by the difficulty of our conflict to preserve it, that we cannot understand how supreme holiness can exist without temptation. But we must remember that temptation and trial only manifest virtue, they do not create it. The Blessed Virgin was prepared, in heart and will, for even the

fiercest temptation. Her soul was so perfect in purity, so compact of holiness, that all the storms of hell that might have dashed against it would never have shaken nor dismayed her. Her soul was like the strong man armed, of whom the Gospel speaks, keeping his court in peace because he is strong. Virtue, holiness, depend on the will —that kingly faculty of choosing, which alone determines our merit or our sin. The will of Mary was inviolably turned to God. The strong, pure, tranquil current of her desires flowed to the biddings of His grace, as the tides of ocean rise and fall and follow the drawings of the moon. Her mind, her heart, her whole being were ruled by the serene and constant power of her will, and that will answered to the last and least impulse of the grace of God.

With such a will, she was perfect and heroic in every act of her whole life, as God had disposed it for her, free from the rebellions of the flesh. With such a will, she would have walked unharmed through any fire of tribulation.

With ourselves, interior temptations have

two great purposes in God's plan—to prove our virtue, and to keep us humble. The virtue of Mary needed no such test, for her will constantly cleaved to God with its entire being. Her humility needed no such stay, because she was the lowliest of God's creatures. Unless she had been supremely humble, she would surely have slipped and fallen from her dizzy height, dizzier by far than that which turned the head even of Lucifer, a prince of God's most excellent angels, and sent him falling lightning-like to hell.

There is another aspect to this freedom of Our Blessed Mother from those temptations which spring from our own corruption. Even had she not been exempt from these by God's special favor, she would have fought them bravely off by the spotless innocence of her own upright will. There are some, even among our fallen race, whose pure wills and careful lives preserve them wonderfully from temptations and sins. To avoid every slight stain of half deliberate sin is impossible, unless we have a special privilege from God, such as He gave to the Virgin Mary. But the vigilance of the pure will of the saints can

so curb and guard the wayward impulses of our nature, that, as was said of St. Bonaventure, they seem hardly to have sinned in Adam, so faultless are their lives. Who can doubt that such a heroism of patient conflict waited ready, if there had been any need, in the immaculate heart of Mary?

What has been said should banish the fallacious thought that her freedom from interior rebellions lessens the glory of the virtues of the Blessed Mother of God and men. But when we come to speak of her exterior trials, a very similar difficulty suggests itself.

No one can doubt that the Blessed Mother was sorely tried by many exterior afflictions. The prophecy of Simeon pointed out to her a path of piercing sorrow. With her divine motherhood came the awful and dread vocation to be the Mother of the Crucified, and every sword that pierced the heart of Jesus wounded most deeply her tenderest of mother's hearts.

But when we think of the sorrows of Mary, an uncomfortable question may arise in our minds. She was indeed the Queen

of Martyrs, the most afflicted of all women. She bore with supreme goodness and patience the supremest trials and anguish. But had she not the plenitude of God's mighty grace? Her glory is indeed above all conceiving. But is her merit so great as it seems? Had she not the fulness of God's grace within her, so that it was impossible for her to be anything but perfect, heroic and sublime?

There is a deadly fallacy here, which we must utterly uncover. It is the old error of Luther, that God's grace supplants and overpowers the freedom of the human will. Grace is a mystery. So is the freedom of man's will. We shall never quite comprehend the great and evident truth that we are free to do good or evil as we choose. Neither can we understand how this freedom of our human will can harmonize with God's utter omnipotence, and with the efficacious power of His grace to rule our souls. It is with this truth as with so many evident facts of nature. We know, we are sure, but we cannot understand. For a hundred thousand years, so astronomers tell us, the earth has been straining swiftly toward the sun. For

a hundred thousand years it has been urging its way off into space. The resultant of these two mighty forces keeps the huge bulk of earth in its orbit—but what these powers are, or how they grip the stony substance of the world, no man can entirely comprehend.

It is so with mysteries. We know the facts—but we cannot fully explain them. They pass beyond the vision of our mind. So we know most surely that God's grace, omnipotent as it is, leaves the human will truly and actually free.

This is of faith—and it adds an immense glory to the life of Our Blessed Mother. The great light and warmth of God's grace in her mind and heart did not take away her free will, they only strengthened, enlightened and exalted it. If she had sinned, with that light, that sweetness, that vigor in her soul, she would have sinned indeed like Lucifer. But when she chose, day by day, to do the perfect will of God, when she watched for every motion of God's grace, and perfectly fulfilled it; when she turned from all allurements of self and the world, and chose always what God willed, it was

not with a blind and necessary service. It was the free, glorious and consummate faithfulness of the handmaid of the Lord which crowned all the gifts of nature and grace which God had showered upon her. It was the eager and mighty virtue of her will which made her the Perfect Woman, most worthy of all God's creatures to be His Mother, who summed up all His life in this one perfect word: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, that I may perfect His work."

IN HER HEART

THERE are many good Christians who profess that they find it hard to pray. They keep God's commandments, have a kind heart for their neighbor's distresses, are loyal to the Church—but they find no comfort or delight in prayer. Their prayers are dry, formal, unconsoling. They are on the lips merely, not from the heart.

To be sure, a feeling of consolation is not the test of good prayer. Prayer is in the will—the yearning of the heart to God. A dry, comfortless prayer may be a very good one, because the will yearns mightily to God, despite the dryness of the feelings. Our feelings are neither meritorious nor wicked in the sight of God. What makes our merit or demerit is the motion of our free and lordly will. Our will is as a loud cry in the ears of God.

Yet it is a great help to have sweetness and consolation in prayer. It helps our will to move mightily, to yearn sincerely to God.

In dryness and desolation we crawl toward our goal with effort and sorrow. In consolation we soar and fly, upborne on the wings of love. The wings of love! Love is the surest and swiftest aid to good praying. If we love well, we shall pray well. The two always walk hand in hand, always help each other.

There are many motives of prayer—desire, when we yearn to God for some good gift; fear, when we crave protection; penitence, when we beg pardon for our past offenses. But of them all the mightiest is love. "The lover flies, runs, and rejoices," says the Imitation; "he is free, and not held. He gives all for all, and has all in all, because he rests in one sovereign good above all, from whom all good flows and proceeds. * * * * Love watches, and sleeping slumbers not. When weary, is not tired; when straitened, is not constrained; when frightened, is not disturbed, but, like a lively flame, and a torch all on fire, it mounts upward and securely passes through all opposition." We must love well to pray well. What, then, is the surest way to love?

To love Our Lord well we must know Him. How can we love what we do not know? The charm of the Godhead, the sweetness of His humanity, will irresistibly draw us to love, if only we know Jesus. But to know Him, we must study Him. We may know a great deal about Him, yet know Him very little. To love Him truly, we must know Him intimately—we must, as a modern poetess has said, know Him by heart! Here, as in all the ways of Christian living, the Most Beloved Woman gives us a most perfect example. She loved Our Lord most perfectly, because she knew Him by heart.

There is a single sentence in the Gospel of St. Luke which opens up for us tender vistas of comprehension of the love of Mary for Jesus.

After the holy evangelist has related the history of the birth of the Saviour, that divine idyl saved in all its touching sweetness in the inspired word, he goes on to tell: "And all that heard wondered; and at those things that were told them by the shepherds." Then, bethinking him of her from whose lips

he had doubtless often heard the story of the Nativity, the holy writer adds: "But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart."

Here is the difference, in a word, between hearing of Our Lord and truly knowing Him. "All that heard wondered." The Gospel story, which they heard from living witnesses, filled their mind with amazement, as it does our own when we read the words of the Scriptures, ages and ages afterward. But of these hearers of the good tidings, how many were stirred to active zeal and love of the new-born Saviour? They heard and wondered, and went their way, and a thousand distracting interests and cares filled their hearts and crowded out the memory of the wondrous Birth. They wondered and forgot, as we have done many a time after a sermon or a bit of reading that stirred our soul.

But not so the Most Beloved Woman. Most lovingly she kept all these words, pondering them in her heart. In the quiet days of Nazareth and Egypt, during the long, still mornings, when country peace fell

all about her small cottage, and only the soft undertone of country sounds, the whir of insects, the chatter of birds, broke the drowsy silence, Mary was pondering in her heart the words which had to do with Jesus. Through the peaceful afternoons, when she sat alone and sewed or spun under her quiet rooftree, her heart was dwelling on Him. She had, it is true, few of those trivial and plaguing distractions which keep our minds foolishly busy, away from God. The simple talk of her fellow villagers, a lowly and pious folk, whose thoughts ran soberly on bethrothals and births and deaths, on crops and seasons and housewifery, did not distract her thoughts from Him. Now, we are made restless with the chatter of three continents, and the low scandals of Europe crowd for space in the daily papers with the evil deeds at home.

But Mary's faith and devotion would have been proof even against the distractions of our shallow and noisy life. In any circumstances, with all her devoted might, she would have kept these words, pondering them in her heart. And as she pondered, her

knowledge of her Divine Son grew and widened and deepened in her heart. And with her knowledge grew her love!

If we would love Jesus, we must follow the example of His Mother, and ponder in our heart the words concerning Him. We have, in the New Testament, a portrait of His life and character, drawn by the Holy Ghost Himself by the hands of the inspired writers. Christ's words, full of strength and sweetness, His deeds, showing forth the dignity of His Godhead, the tenderness of His most perfect Humanity, are set down for us in language that everyone can understand. There are indeed mysteries in the Sacred Writ, and hard sayings. But on these we need not linger. Enough for us to read, with an open and humble mind, the clear and simple record of the Life of Christ, from His birth to His death, and ponder it deeply in our hearts.

The Bible is a singular book among all the writings of men. To be understood, it must be read by the light of the grace of God. It gives up its sweet and tender secrets, not to the proud eye of the infidel and self-

sufficient scholar, but to the lowly and pure of heart. The unbeliever may, and indeed he does, study the sacred page and learn it by heart, with astonishing industry and skill. He sifts each word and peers into every grammatical construction. But he does not see Christ behind that maze of wordy criticism. Like dust blown into his eyes, the letter of the Scripture blinds him to its spirit and truth. He sees before him only a human document, amazingly old, intensely interesting, but human merely. No divine consolation flows to his heart from its pages. He does not see, in that sublime central Figure of all history, the dignity and sweetness of the Word made Flesh.

It is the man or woman of lowly and simple faith, who yields humbly to the unerring teaching of Christ's Church and follows her guidance through the Holy Scriptures, who best can understand the Heart of Christ as He has revealed it in the New Testament. If, therefore, you would know Our Lord and so learn to love Him, follow the example of His Blessed Mother, and keep the words which tell of Him, humbly, pon-

dering them in your heart. Keep always by you, where you can easily take it up at leisure moments, a copy of the Scriptures, and let your eyes drink in, often and even hourly, sweet sips of the inspired Word. Then, pondering these things in your heart, you will grow into a blessed familiarity with Jesus. He will become for you an hourly memory, an intimate Presence, a most consoling Friend. The thought of Him will color your whole life, as it did that of His Holy Mother, and while your mind dwells on the words concerning Him, your heart will often leap up to Him in spontaneous prayer. For we cannot truly know Jesus without loving Him, and prayer is the natural expression of our love.

It was so with the Most Beloved Woman, our gentle model and guide in holy loving. The constant occupation of her days was to keep these words and ponder them in her heart. From all sources she gathered the words of her Divine Son,—from the disciples, who had shared His journeyings; from the holy women, who followed Him about, ministering to Him; from the apos-

tles, who were His intimate friends. She had no need, indeed, to read them in the books of the Scriptures; the living word of the apostolic age was ever in her ears. She was the Mother of the infant Church, and heard the Gospel story, in which she had borne so large a part, time and again from the very lips of the actors in it. Men's memories had not been spoiled, in that simple age, by the multiplication of trivial books. With a marvelous clearness of detail they went over and over again all the memories of the life of Christ.

Tradition tells us that Our Blessed Mother lived many years after the death of her Son. How could she endure to be separated from Him, whom she loved with so clinging and devoted a love? After the thirty years which she had spent with Him, were not her days empty and full of longing, until she should once more see the light of His eyes and feel the touch of His hand in His everlasting kingdom? Was not earth an intolerable suffering of desire for her, and life an unbearable agony of expectation,

until she should find once more the Son whom she had lost?

We need not think so. This Child of her love and desire was with her still, in memory, hope, and love, though in His visible presence He had gone from her into heaven. The words of Jesus still echoed in her ears with inconceivable sweetness. His looks still shone upon her heart. St. John, the beloved, fed her upon the flesh of her Son in the Holy Eucharist, and still, faithful and devoted Virgin, she kept the words she had received, pondering them in her heart.

And thinking ever of Him and loving Him she prayed to Him without ceasing, a mighty and continual prayer that pierced the heavens and moved the Heart of Christ and won unmeasured blessings for us all. If, then, we would pray as she did we must love as she did; and the way to that love she has likewise shown us—to learn Our Lord by heart.

OUR MODELS OF EVERY DAY

God is sweetly merciful, even to the weaknesses and littleness of our souls. He understands this human nature which He has made, supremely well. The secrets of all our hearts lie utterly bare before Him, and He has planned His universe from all the ages to lead them powerfully back to Him. That is why in those sublimest and most heroic examples which He puts before us, He has deigned to give us models of perfection even in little things.

Our lives, after all, are made up of little things. The great, eventful days are few and far between, and we look backward to them and forward, from the humdrum level of every day. Heroic opportunities, great occasions for stirring deeds, come to all of us only very rarely, and to most of us not at all. Our heroism, our sanctity, must spring up from and be made out of the commonplace material of every day.

But our common, work-a-day lives seem so little fitted to be the soil of holiness! It

seems to us so hard, even hopeless, to become true saints, great servants of God, in our present tedious surroundings. Our circumstances are so discouraging, our lot is so commonplace. We have such wearisome difficulties and temptations. Of course we can struggle on with God's help and somehow save our souls. But any unusual holiness seems far beyond our powers, in the grind and struggle of every day.

When we read some of the Lives of the Saints, they do not tend to encourage us. They describe the saints as beings so differently situated from ourselves. Some of them were martyrs, and they had no choice but to be either saints or apostates. Others may seem to us to have been preternaturally shielded and protected in a holy life from their mother's arms. Still others performed penances, made acts of renunciation which are simply unthinkable for us. We cannot flee to deserts. We cannot spend our nights in prayer. Our weak bodies and weaker souls would break and shatter under such stress and struggle. They are hardly equal to the wear and worry of every day.

Again, to many sincere and earnest souls, great holiness seems such a complicated affair. To read some books on holiness, one would think the study of perfection quite the most difficult study in the world. There are so many cautions and rules and admonitions. One must take so much thought, and keep so many counsels. Busy, distracted men or women in the world—how can they hope to become holy? Is there no short cut to saintliness? Is there no simpler means of sanctifying every day?

Of course there is. Hundreds and thousands of unlearned people, girls and boys, men and women, have found it out by God's grace, and are finding it out more and more in their humdrum work-a-day lives. The simple, obvious means which is making them more and more holy is the loving imitation of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother.

Imitation is the most natural and easy way of learning. Our minds, our bodies, learn most readily and easily when we try to imitate what we see before us. From the little toddler who makes his first wobbly steps in the nursery, to the poet who writes

an age-enduring epic, we all learn best and most quickly what we know by imitation. By imitating what is right and good, we are saved much trouble and speculation. There it is before us—we have only to put in practice what we see.

What a sweet mercy it is to us, that God has given us for our imitation the two perfect characters of Jesus and Mary. For two thousand years He taught and exhorted the Jews by their prophets and the patriarchs, and yet how dim and faint was their notion of holiness. Then Jesus and Mary, the Sun of holiness and the pure, luminous moon, beamed on the earth, and in one generation the world was filled with saints and martyrs.

Again, think how alluring, how clear and easily understood is the example which they offer us. These two are not only the holiest, they are the most charming, lovable, and endearing of all the persons of history. The sweet, human attractiveness of their characters has made the unbelievers—atheists, Mussulmans, and Jews—sigh with admiration and delight.

Our Lord and Saviour is, indeed, the sub-

lime and unique Model of all mankind. He combines in His own adorable yet human self all conceivable holiness and perfection. He is the supreme object lesson of sanctity and perfection. God became man, to show mankind how to become like to God.

But the perfect sanctity of Mary brings out in clearest light the *imitableness* of Her Divine Son. We might despair of following in the footsteps of a God, but we see before us the gentle form of Mary. She, like ourselves, was merely human. She, like ourselves, was a mere creature, and yet she followed perfectly, in her own way, the perfect model of her Son. He is the source and exemplar of all holiness. She is His perfect follower and disciple. He shows us the supreme example. She points out to us the sweet and beautiful possibility of perfectly imitating Him. He leads us in the strait and narrow way. She encourages us, weak and human as we are, to walk behind Him in it.

Again, our dear Lord's character and mission might sometimes tend to obscure, to our weak eyes, the force of His example for us

common men and women. He was the Lord's Anointed, the Priest and King of men. True, He spent thirty of His thirty-three years on earth, in giving us an example of the holiness of every day, of that humdrum and obscure and wearisome holiness which, as we have said, we common Christians find so difficult. Yet the three wonderful and superhuman years of the public ministry might make our feeble minds forget that lesson of the hidden life, did we not have before our eyes a continual reminder in the sweet person of the Virgin Mary.

For all her life was a hidden life—a life devoted and consumed in the holiness of every day. How meekly and briefly this most beloved woman appears, to our eager eyes, in the dear chronicle of the gospels, how few were her public acts, how far between her public utterances. All her days passed in the small, outwardly insignificant occupations, which take up so much of our waking hours. She practised the sublimest virtues, and followed perfectly the perfect example of her Son, in the obscure, common, tedious duties of a housewife. The plainest of plain

people, the unknown wife of a lowly carpenter, she was the Queen of martyrs and confessors, because she did little and obscure things like our own daily actions, with more than a martyr's love and more than a confessor's faithfulness.

We excuse ourselves for not being holy by the plea that we cannot imitate the heroic excesses of the saints. Here is the Queen of saints, the holiest of all mere creatures, and yet which one of us cannot follow in the footsteps of this lowly handmaid of God? She rose each morning to a day of simple, unseen toil like our own, a round of homely duties, of sweeping and dusting, cooking and spinning, in no way different from the work of the hundreds of thousands of Israel's daughters round about her. She did the work that servants do, and mothers of poor families. But when she awakened to that day of toil, the flame of her heart rose straight upward toward God. For Him were every thought and word and action of hers simply intended, and with an inconceivable purity and intensity of love. He was the one sole Lord and Master of her heart.

We should be amazed, one thinks, if we could see the daily life of Jesus and Mary and Joseph, and should reflect that they were, of all creatures on earth, rendering the most heroic praise and service to God. Their life was as quiet and as uneventful as any every-day of ours could be. Prayer and work, work and prayer, the long dull routine of uneventful mornings and afternoons, hard work for the Blessed Mother in her little cottage, hard work for Jesus and His Foster-Father at the carpenter's bench—and all this for nearly twenty years! In this way, in these humdrum surroundings, these three lowly toilers gave God the supremest service, praise, and glory, which He had ever received or was ever to receive from all His human creatures.

How easy, then, it must be to be holy! How easy to imitate Jesus and His Most Beloved Mother—one can do so in any rank or employment whatsoever! Their holiness is most sublime, yet it is most simple. It lies in the most absolute fidelity to the lowly, ordinary tasks of every day, from the motive of the most pure and constant love of God.

Do not undervalue, then, the holy opportunities which lie around you. It was from such opportunities that the Word Incarnate and His Virgin Mother built up their perfect holiness. When the heavens and the earth are no more, and the just exult forever in glory, their sweet converse together in eternity will not be of the great exploits of princes, nor even of the sublime austerities of the saints. They will oftener look tenderly back upon the little cottage of Nazareth, and their souls will overflow with sweetest rapture at the thought of the perfect, wonderful lives of that Holy Family, our blessed and heroic models of a perfect life of every day.

THE MOTHER OF FAIR LOVE

WE FIND it hard sometimes to reconcile the thought of supernatural love with natural affection. "Nature" is a word misused in so many ways that it has come at last to have an unpleasant sound. Not understanding that God's grace transforms and ennobles our natural affections, instead of supplanting and destroying them, too many persons come to think that there is some enmity between nature and grace, and that we must put off our tender and human affections in order to love God and man in a manner altogether supernatural and holy.

The cure for this illusion, as for so many others, is to look lovingly at the Most Beloved Woman. She is a sweetly perfect and intelligible compendium of practical holiness. She is a text-book of divine love; she is a perpetual object lesson to us, showing us in action the supernatural love of a mere creature for the Uncreated Love.

In the pure soul of Mary nature and grace

conspired together to enkindle her whole immaculate being with the sublimest flame of heavenly love. The sweet and keen influence of God's grace, falling upon her ready heart like pentecostal fire, transfigured all her mighty human affections and kindled them with supernatural love. Burning with God's fiery grace, her heart glowed utterly with unselfish love, and while her virginal mind dwelt perpetually on the Infinite Loveliness, her pure affections yearned out to the God of Israel with unimaginable tenderness and power.

We must never forget that the heart of the Most Beloved Woman was in the truest, deepest, sense a womanly heart. Man and woman, in the designs of God, are wonderfully meant to divide between them the activities of human life. Not only in the narrower sphere of wedlock, but in the broader family of the world, the man is ever meant to be the father, the woman is made to be a mother. Those good men and holy women who never take upon themselves the task of literal fatherhood or motherhood, become by the very instinct of their hearts fathers

and mothers to all around them. In the Church, by a holy felicity of phrase, priests are called "Fathers" and Sisters are called "Mothers." The very hearts of good men and women lean toward and are made for the holy tenderness of a wide and spiritual fatherhood or motherhood.

The heart of Our Blessed Lady was in the fullest, holiest sense a womanly heart. Her nature, unspoiled and perfect always as it came from the hands of God, was a womanly nature, tender, affectionate and human. The womanly heart has a genius for love and devotion, and her Divine Son had formed the heart of Mary to be a model for all loving hearts.

She had, then, by nature, a genius, so to speak, for loving, and the abounding grace of God and her own vigilant, steadfast will were ever ready to turn the whole power of that mighty love to its due object, God and to her neighbor for God's love alone. Many men and women with great powers of self-devotion waste their love on unworthy objects; many sadly squander their hearts away. But the great heart of the Most Be-

loved Woman poured all its splendid wealth of pure devotion with eager promptness at the feet of God. It needed the keen stroke of contrition to break the heart of Magdalen and pour her fragrant love at Jesus' feet. But the virginal heart of Mary loved so from the beginning. Her love was as dutiful as it was sublime and mighty. Nature worked in her utterly with grace, and both together fanned her holy love.

These thoughts may in some way prepare us at least feebly to imagine how the Blessed Mother loved her adorable Son. The tiny virgin whose parents led her to the temple had in her heart a flame of love for God, pure and fervent beyond what our faint hearts and dull intelligences can conceive. The growing maiden grew in love of God, and her strengthening powers were more and more enkindled with God's love. She loved Jehovah more than did even the fiery Isaias, the pure Jeremias, the rapt Ezechiel. This little Jewish maid was a more valiant lover of her Lord than David. She whispered the fiery love songs of the Prophet King, and read into them more of fervor and tender-

ness than his great heart had comprehended. Already the little handmaid of the Lord had in her tender heart surpassed God's greatest lovers of old.

But the God whom Joseph's virginal Spouse loved and adored was a hidden God, revealed only in dim prophecies and types and figures. True, she knew how to discern His lineaments in Creation, and could mount the heights of contemplation and rise above all beauty and glory of creatures to the creating Majesty. But she began her life under the law of fear. It was her own Son who was to inaugurate the law of love!

Then, one day, in one supreme hour at which all other hours, past or to come, look forward or backward forever, the God whom her heart had always loved lay, her own Son, within her arms! The Eternal had taken on Himself a life of moments and hours. The Infinite had come to lie within her slight, encircling arms. Now, the great prophecies, the splendid types and figures on which her soul had dwelt for all her years, seemed pale and poor and dim beside this most glorious Reality. The center of all devotion lay on

her own pure bosom. The tremendous, uncreated Love on whom her own love had fed and pondered, now spoke a near, sweet, intimate message to her, in the soft beatings of a little Heart!

Try to imagine, at that supreme moment, how heaven and earth conspired together to multiply and deepen the love of the Most Beloved Woman. This God-babe was all her own. Her whole nature, from which His human nature had sprung, yearned to Him with more than a mother's love. She was His only parent on earth, and all the human tenderness of parenthood rose in sweet, overpowering fulness in her heart whenever she looked upon Him. Most human and most heavenly, always most heavenly even when it was most deeply human, the love of Mary for Jesus is a shining lesson to us how we may raise our human love to be divine. She would not have loved God well if she had not loved Him as His Mother. The love He had come to require of her was the love of a human mother, all transfigured and deepened and set on fire by the love of a creature for her God. In some

such way, Jesus had come to every one of us, to demand from us a human love and tenderness. He will be loved, not only as our God, but also as our Brother, and He will have us love all our other brethren for His dear sake with pure and supernatural, and yet with tender and human love. He bids us keep in our hearts all kindliness, friendliness and human charity, but deepen and strengthen it with supernatural intent. We must love Our Elder Brother Jesus as Mary loved Him, and for His sake we must love ourselves and all mankind as Mary loved us for His sake.

Pray to the sweet Mother of God and of men that she may teach us the secret of her love, at once so human and so heavenly. Pray that we, in this unlovely and unloving age, when there is so much talk of love and so little true, unselfish loving, may learn from her the secret of loving wisely and well both God and men. Ask her to make us comprehend how the deep possibilities of human affection which we feel within us are not to be suppressed nor stifled, but taught to borrow a divine and heavenly fire from God's

ready grace, and to consume our hearts with tenderness for God and for our neighbor. She, the Most Beloved Woman, is also the Mother of fair love, and of fear, and of knowledge, and of holy hope.

THE MOST BELOVED WOMAN IN PROPHECY

THE MORNING STAR

THE personality of the Messias colors the whole story of the ancient Law, as the unrisen sun gives the whole world its waking color and beauty. And where Jesus is so wonderfully foreshadowed, we should confidently look to see also some promise of Mary; for these two—no lover of them both can ever weary of hearing or repeating it—are more wonderfully and singularly linked together than any other persons, save the Blessed Trinity. There can be no better prelude to our subject than to dwell a while upon the bonds between Jesus and Mary; for we are to see these very bonds wonderfully foreshadowed in the Oracles of God.

To begin with, the tie between mother and son is the closest of all natural ties. Yet no other mother ever was to her son what Mary was to Jesus; for she was to Him, if one may say so, both father and mother—other human parent He had not. This

Mother was His sole parent on earth, even as His Father was in heaven, and so He owed to her, alone among all earthly beings, the full and sole love of His filial heart.

But closer far than this natural bond was the spiritual parenthood between Jesus and Mary; though there, indeed, it is Jesus who is parent, and Mary, in the realms of grace, is His first-born and immaculate child, the offspring of His pre-redemption. Finally, although the gulf between created and uncreated holiness forever lies between them, even across that abyss Jesus and Mary are linked together in a wonderful kinship of consummate sanctity. Each was the very perfect flower in the flesh of God's eternal wish, the full realization of God's ideal.

As they are so singularly united in this threefold kinship, so also are they singularly apart from the rest of mankind. The saints are glorious for their struggles toward the perfect ideal, these two alone have achieved it. No wonder, then, that they are forever together, in our thoughts, upon our lips. No wonder that Mary's name runs like a sweet echo of Jesus' Name through the sacred

liturgies. These things in mind, it is natural that we should look to see them joined together even in the foreshadowings of prophecy; and should strain our eyes to discern by the side of the Messias in the prophetic visions, ages before her Immaculate Conception, the figure of His Virgin Mother. And we do so descry that pure and lovely presence, even in the remotest years—decades of centuries before her name was on the lips of men—joined to her Son even in that obscure and hoary eld, in the speech of His prophets, as she was in the awful thoughts of God.

OLD TESTAMENT TYPES

It would be interesting, indeed, to trace out in detail all the outlines of her perfect character as they were prefigured in the heroic and saintly women of the ancient Law. That they are delineated there goes without question; for as all manly virtues, holiness, piety, courage and the rest, point directly to Jesus as their fountain and exemplar: so do all womanly beauty, strength and tenderness point to Jesus, too, but by way of Mary. In these two are gathered up all human dig-

nity and glory. It is the splendid prerogative of these two ideals made real that all human goodness suggests their names. Just as the intellectual ideal gathers to itself all real perfection, so in some sort does all human praise and honor gather about the name of Jesus, and, for Jesus' sake, of Mary.

Little marvel, then, if all Catholic peoples have easily understood the purpose of the Most High to give us in the holy Jewish women foreshadowings of the Mother of God. For should the comeliness of Sara, the gentle kindness of Rebecca, the prayerfulness of Anna, Ruth's lowly serviceableness, the chastity of Susanna, Judith's courage, Esther's obedience, the piety of the Machabee, and all the rest, be wanting in that Most Beloved Woman who was to gather to herself all the glory of her sex, and bring forth into the world the boast of Israel? In type and figure, then, the Elect Woman of ages shines forth most brightly from the inspired Word. But every lover of Mary would urge one question more: What place has Mary in the prophecies? What explicit tidings of her came from the

lips of those speakers-forth of futurity, whose knowledge was given from the mind of God?

FOUR MARIAN PROPHECIES

There are four places in Holy Writ which distinctly refer to Mary. The first is in Genesis—the Proto-Evangelion (Gen. iii. 15); the second, in Isaias, in those chapters called the Book of Emmanuel. (Is. vii, ix, xi.) Then follow a passage in Jeremias, and another in Micheas. But these last are each only a single phrase—a mere allusion, it may be, to Isaias' splendid prophecy. Let us dwell a bit upon each of these inspired passages, and see what they have to reveal of the prerogatives and gifts of Mary. And first for the prophecy in Genesis.

It was at the sad moment when Adam and Eve, who had yielded to the serpent's tempting, and felt for the first time the stings of guilt and of concupiscence, were called trembling from their hiding-place, to hear the sentence of their offended God. No need to rehearse all the melancholy passage. Let us begin with verse the twelfth. "And Adam

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said: The woman, whom Thou gavest me to be my companion, gave me of the tree, and I did eat. (13) And the Lord God said to the woman: Why hast thou done this? And she answered: The serpent deceived me, and I did eat. (14) And the Lord God said to the serpent: Because thou hast done this thing, thou art cursed among all cattle and beasts of the earth. Upon thy breast shalt thou go, and earth shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. (15) I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed: she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."

It is this fifteenth verse, brief in words, but inexpressibly precious in its meaning, which contains the first promise of a coming Saviour—that Proto-Evangelion, over which all future generations were to linger, first in weary yearning, then in exultant gratefulness for the Redeemer, who was promised and then given to ease men of Adam's sin. And what part, in God's glad message, has Mary? In our brief compass, we shall not, as we said before, delay over the long wrangles of exegesis which have raged about the

text of this evangel. Enough to give the winnowed grain of an interpretation widely accepted and in accord with sound and Catholic doctrine.

In these words, then, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed," we see very clearly, at least in the light of the prophecy's fulfilment, a foretelling of the Immaculate Conception. For, in the first place, to quote authority, Pope Pius IX., in his Bull *Immortalis Deus* defining the doctrine, gives us plainly to understand that in this text the Fathers and Doctors of the Church have seen, clearly and openly expressed, the promise of the world's Redeemer and the foretelling of His Holy Mother, and at the same time, most clearly set forth, the utter enmity of either with the devil.

"And so," the Bull continues, "just as Christ (*sicut Christus*), the Mediator between God and man, when He had taken human nature, blotting out the handwriting of the decree which was against us, fixed it, a conqueror, to the cross, so the Most Holy Virgin joined to Him by a most close and

indissoluble bond, with Him and through Him cherishing an everlasting enmity against the venomous serpent, has gained over it the fullest triumph, and crushed its head with her immaculate foot."

And when, in the light of tradition, we consider the text itself, the matter is plain enough. For, by God's promise, there was to be enmity between Satan and the woman —but what woman? Not Eve; for she had just made a sad, irrevocable alliance with the power of evil, by eating the forbidden fruit. Not any of her common daughters; for they were involved in the common doom. There is only one woman in history to whom that perfect enmity could be foretold—an enmity which should be betwixt her and the serpent, as between her seed and the serpent's seed. Hence when this promise was given, it must have been Mary who was in the mind of God. And, to borrow a phrase from the New Testament, the Angel Gabriel's salutation, "Hail, full of grace!" has sounded to many ears like the echo of that Proto-Evangel; for so did Mary fulfil the

olden promise: by being full of grace at her conception, and full of grace all her days, at perfect enmity with the ancient serpent from the first moment when she began to be until she stood at heaven's door.

Did Adam and Eve comprehend the scope and meaning of this glorious prophecy? Probably, as they heard it, their minds perturbed and dazed, their whole being a-tremble with remorse and fear, they caught only the literal purport of the promise—that their evil-doing was to be atoned for, that of their progeny a Saviour was to be born who would crush the head of their malignant and insidious foe. It was reserved for us, in the light of after days, to see with exultation how the words in their full and perfect meaning prophesied, indeed, that there should arise in time a glorious Woman, free from the stain of Adam's sin, who was to bring forth the Saviour of the world.

THE SECOND MARIAN PROPHECY

As time passed on, God vouchsafed, with greater and greater clearness, to foretell by the prophets the advent of the Saviour. He

was to be of the race of Abraham, of the family of Jacob, of the tribe of Juda, of the seed of David. And in all these prophecies do we find no word of Mary? Indeed, whether the prophets knew it or no, they all brought tidings of her no less than of Him. For her race and tribe and family were the very same as His; she was to be His only bond with His own tribe, as with the great human family, the sole parent of the heavenly Child.

It is this truth—the sole-parenthood of Mary, or the virginal birth of Our Lord—which first shines out to human vision in the mighty prophecy of Isaias, son of Amos. This part of Isaias' writings, which is called the Book of Emmanuel, is so pre-eminent among the Marian prophecies that we may take time to consider it in its context and its historical setting. It was during the early days of the reign of Achaz, son of Joathan, about the year before Christ 735. The little kingdom of Juda, after its long day of prosperity and peace under Ozias and Joathan, has grown in opulence and outward show until Jerusalem is a great capital. But, alas,

this prosperity is only a gilded rottenness! The people of Israel have gone apart from the way of God. Soothsayers and enchanters, the abominations of idolatry, the rank evils of luxury and excess, are as a stench in the nation. To scourge these abuses, God raises up the Prophet Isaias, appears to him in the majesty of His heavenly splendor, sends to him a seraph to cleanse his lips with a burning coal, and bids him go forth and cry to a people who will not hear.

Then, while the prophet is crying out to the hardened people of Jerusalem of the judgments of God which are to come, against the venality and oppression of her rulers, against the pride of her princes, against the rapacity of her rich men, the luxury and vanity of her women, behold, there gathers over against the proud and wicked city the darkening shadow of a cloud of war. It is Rasin, king of Syria, and Phacee, usurper of the sceptre of Israel, who, fearful of the growing power of Theglathphalasar of Assyria, are closing upon Juda, to force the weak and timorous Achaz into a coalition against the

object of their common fear. And when Achaz heard of the oncoming of these near-by enemies, "his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind." (Is. vii, 2.)

If a man of God had sat upon the throne of David—some pious-hearted monarch, like his father Joathan or his son Ezechias—there would have been scant cause for fear. But Achaz was one of those dark-hearted kings of Juda, cowards toward men but rashly brave toward God, who, with foolish daring, did evil in the very shadow of Jahve's rod. And so, idolater that he was, in this crisis he had in mind to seek refuge in the armies of the king of Assyria rather than in the power of the Lord of Hosts. "And the Lord said to Isaias: Go forth to meet Achaz, thou and Jasub thy son that is left, to the conduit of the upper pool in the way of the fuller's field. And thou shalt say to him: See thou be quiet; fear not, and let not thy heart be afraid of the two tails of these firebrands, smoking with the wrath of the fury of Rasin, king of Syria, and the son of Romelia."

A THRILLING MOMENT

The situation is one dramatic in the extreme. Achaz has come forth to the conduit of the upper pool, doubtless to see to the water supply of Jerusalem, his mind a prey to anxious fears, and full of the hoped-for alliance with Theglathphalasar. Over against the craven monarch comes Isaias, "the Salvation of the Lord." "Fear not," he says, "these burnt-out firebrands of kings that come against you. Jahve (Jehovah) himself has said: Their counsel shall not stand. But if you will not believe in Jahve's word, you shall not continue in your prosperous ways."

Small heed would Achaz pay to such a promise and warning. The Assyrian armies for him! He would manage his own affairs without Jahve's or the prophet's aid. One can see the dark and impassioned eye of Isaias kindle as he looked upon the sullen brow of this degenerate son of David, this craven king, who personified the idolatrous wickedness, the rebellious luxury and pride of Israel. But God spoke yet again by His prophet's lips. "And the Lord spoke again

to Achaz, saying: Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God, either unto the depth of hell or unto the height above. And Achaz said: I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord."

This cold and hypocritical response, which cloaked a sullen resolution to have none of the prophet's interference in the counsels of Juda, was a last touch, that flung wide the floodgates of Isaias' holy anger, and made way for one of the grandest and most stirring denunciations ever spoken by the lips of man. Yet, mingled with the roarings of that lion-wrath, the pity of the Infinite Father mingled a strain of unspeakably consoling promise. From the wickedness of Achaz and his people, God turned to speak of a worthy king of a worthy Juda—just as of old He had made to dawn the sweet and glorious promise of a Saviour, from the very midnight of Adam's primal sin. "*Felix culpa!*" From the setting of Achaz's evil star comes the portent of the rise of the Blessed Emmanuel!

So the Spirit of God seized on the soul of the seer, and he burst forth into im-

passioned prophecy. "And he said: Hear ye, therefore, O house of David: Is it a small thing for you to be grievous to men, that you are grievous to my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel. He shall eat butter and honey, that He may know to refuse the evil and to choose the good. For before the child know to refuse the evil and to choose the good, the land which thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of the face of her two kings."

But not for Achaz is this to be a sign of gladness—before this Child is born the land of Juda shall be desolate. The Assyrian, whom Achaz has dared to trust before his God, shall be the razor of God to shave the land of Juda until that fair country is all a wilderness. Then—for this sign of Emmanuel is too far off to serve for the people of Juda—God gives the present generation another and a visible sign. The prophet writes in great letters a warning of Israel's approaching doom. "And the Lord said to me: Take thee a great book, and write in it

with a man's pen. 'Take away the spoils with speed, quickly take the prey.' " And by this name, in Hebrew, "Maher Shalal Hash Baz," he calls his newborn son, whom his spouse, the prophetess, has borne him.

And now follows in the Book of Isaias a long, passionate outpouring of warning and of consolation. It is a mingled strain of wrath against the evil-doers of Israel, of hope and promise for the remnant who shall be saved. And ever and again, in blue and sunny rifts amidst the storm, gleam the bright figures of the Virgin and her Child, the hope and expectation who is to come and save the people from their sins.

TWO QUESTIONS

Such is the Book of Emmanuel, the beginning of that amazing flood of prophecy concerning the Messias which raises the son of Amos above all his inspired peers, and makes St. Jerome exclaim of him that his prophecy is indeed a fifth evangel, he a prophet-evangelist. And here, though this is in no way a controversial discussion, we

must pause a moment to answer two questions around which have waged a long war of controversy. Is Emmanuel the Messias? and, Is there here predicted a virgin birth? We Catholics can give only one answer to these questions—the true one: "Yes," and "Yes."

To begin with, St. Matthew, in his opening verses, settles the first of them for us out of hand. For, after he has told us of the angel's witness to Joseph that Mary's Son is of the Holy Ghost, the Evangelist assures us (Matt. i, 22, 23): "Now, all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the Prophet, saying: *Behold, a Virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel*, which being interpreted is, *God with us*." And again, when Christ left Nazareth to dwell in Capharnaum, he bids us consider that this was "that it might be fulfilled which was said by Isaias the prophet: *Land of Zabulon and land of Nephthalim, the way of the sea beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people that sat in darkness hath seen great light: and to them that*

sat in the region of the shadow of death, light is sprung up." (Matt. iv, 14, 15.)

The words of the prophet which St. Matthew quotes here are from Isaias (ix, 1, 2). And if we follow up the Prophet's allusions to Emmanuel, the same truth becomes still more undeniably clear. For we read in chapter viii, spoken of the king of Assyria: "And the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Emmanuel." What child unborn could be thus hailed as the Lord of Juda save only Him that was to come? And again (ix, 6, 7): "For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us; and the government is upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace. His empire shall be multiplied, and there shall be no end of peace. He shall sit upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom: to establish it and strengthen it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth and forever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this." And in chapter xi comes the glorious prophecy which makes Him of the

seed of David: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness."

As to the second question—Is there here predicted a virgin birth?—the text itself is not so perfectly clear, though it gives solid ground enough to any unbiased reader. *Almah*, the Hebrew word which St. Jerome has rendered *virgo*, means a virtuous young woman, not yet wedded; it is much the same term as *Jungfrau* in German, *doncella* in Spanish, *zitella* in Italian, *pucelle* in French, or our English word "maid" or "damsel." Now, this term *almah* is never used of a married woman. The Septuagint translates it ἡ παρθενος; the Peschito or Syrian text has *bethultha* (virgin); the Vulgate, *virgo*. And if we look to the testimony of antiquity, *almah* in this text was never thought to mean anything but virgin even by the Jews, until Christian apologists began to insist upon the prophecy, and its fulfilment in Christ, as a

telling argument. Until about a hundred years ago, the Protestants themselves defended this meaning; and for the Catholic, the unanimous voice of the Fathers, Doctors, and theologians, interpreting the text as a prophecy of the virgin birth, removes all doubt that we should see herein a forecast of Mary's virgin motherhood.

And to what purpose would the prophet have called up the figure of this Maiden out of the dim, far future, and laid such stress upon her maidenhood, if there was nothing to distinguish the manner of her giving birth from the lot of all the mothers of Juda? From the literal rendering of the Hebrew text, this argument grows still more clear: "Behold, a Virgin with child, bringing forth a Son, and she calls his name God-with-us." All this is surely quite enough of argument for him who has eyes to see.

A SUMMING UP

And now, after this breathless run over the field of exegetics, what grain have we garnered of Marian prophecy from Isaias' words? Clearly this, that the Mother of

the Messias is to be a virgin—a virgin who, by the power of God, shall bring forth her son and still remain a virgin. And here we have the second of those great and singular bonds which link together Jesus and Mary. He is to be all her own, hers and God's alone, with no earthly father to divide her claim upon the Heaven-sent Child.

THE OTHER PROPHECIES

The other two passages, in Micheas and Jeremias, add but little to our store of prophecy. Micheas tells us, indeed, the very birthplace of Our Saviour: "AND THOU, BETHLEHEM, EPHRATA, art a little one among the thousands of Juda: out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be the ruler in Israel: and His going forth *is* from the beginning, from the days of eternity." (Mich. v. 2.) Then he repeats the prediction of the Messias' birth: "Even till the time wherein she that traileth shall bring forth." (Ibid. v. 3.) And Jeremias (xxxi. 22) seems to St. Jerome to foretell once again the virgin birth. But, after Isaias' splendid voice, these echoes sound faint and far away.

Such, then, is the clear and unmistakable part which Mary has in the sublime prophecy which through the ages consoled the faithful hearts in Israel with promises of Him who was to be. Those mighty mountain-peaks, the seers of Jahve, shouldering up into the rare atmosphere of inspiration, caught these gleams of Mary—her Immaculate Conception, her fulness of grace, the virgin birth—which flashed gloriously from the East together with the rays of the Orient from on high, and flamed on their astonished brows with enigmatic splendor.

For how could they comprehend, in that elder day, when woman was held to be so slight a thing—not counted in the genealogies of Israel—why this Woman should be the sole parent of Him who was to be? How could they understand why her bringing forth her Child was to be the most singular of miracles, and why her name should open the lips of the fiery son of Amos, and be the first word of his long outpouring of prophetic vision, wherein was so clearly spoken the glory and the power of her yearned-for Son? But to us, turning back into the gloom of old

the full light of a perfect revelation, nothing could be more fit, nothing more admirably in accord with the office and the dignity of Mary than that she should be the day-star of Emmanuel in the inspired writings, even as she was in the world of prophecy-come-true.

In conclusion, one may observe an admirable concordance between these sayings of Isaias and the words of those angelic messengers who were sent to Mary and to Joseph to announce to them the coming of the Child. Of the angel's message to Joseph we have already spoken. So clear is the parallel between the prophecy and its accomplishment that St. Matthew quotes in his text the words of Isaias, and bids us mark how they are now fulfilled. But the words of Gabriel to Mary, as we have them in St. Luke's Gospel, afford us an even more striking parallel. "Behold," had said the prophet, "a Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and she shall call His name Emmanuel." "Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son," says the Angel Gabriel to Mary, "and thou shalt call His name Jesus." Then,

summarizing the sixth and seventh verses of the ninth chapter of Isaias, the angel continues: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob forever. And of His kingdom there shall be no end."

THE FULFILMENT

Surely Mary must have recognized the source of the angel's greeting; but perhaps the Holy Virgin was not quite assured in her mind that the Messias' was to be a virgin birth. For she asks, in those words dear and familiar to us all: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?" Then Gabriel, taking unto himself the rôle of prophet, adds a new clearness to Isaias' splendid prophecy: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." The consummation was at hand. The fulness of God's designs was plain at last to that chosen Woman, prom-

ised to Adam so many weary centuries before. It remained for that same perfect and admirable Woman only to speak those words of lowly concord with the Heavenly Will—the most momentous words that ever came from lips of woman: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord! Be it done to me according to thy word." Then was the burning word of Isaias the prophet accomplished. Then the long series of Messianic promise and foretelling was fulfilled at last by the loving will of Heaven; for the Word had become Flesh and dwelt among us.

THE CONSECRATION OF WOMANHOOD

JESUS CHRIST, the eternal Son of God made man, has anointed and ennobled forever with the chrism of His Godhead our common humanity. It is a man and no angel nor archangel, nor even one of the seraphim or the cherubim, who sits at the right hand of the Father and hears from Him those awful words, mysterious and sublime, "Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee." For all the serene and blissful ages of eternity we, with all the heavenly court and all the exalted princes of the nine choirs, shall adore, with that profoundest homage which can be given to God alone, a Man, as truly man as He is truly God, as truly God as he is truly man—one of our race and our kind, a blood brother of us all, now and for all eternity. The unction of the Godhead, the hypostatic union has descended upon our humanity and given us a dignity and a standing in creation which, as some of the Fathers conjecture, stirred the third of the

angelic host to envy and sent them hurling down in the fiery fall of their rebellion from heaven to hell rather than adore a God become man.

We are all sharers in this dignity. Though to only one human nature was it given to be assumed by the person of the Word so that it can be truly said that this is the body and the soul of God, still by that union we all are made blood brothers of the God-Man and become entitled to call ourselves with truth the kinsmen of the Son of God. More truly than the elevation of one of their race to earthly dignity confers nobility on all his kin, this substantial union of a body and a soul of our kind with the Word who is God confers on all the sons of Adam a nobility beyond human comprehension, which it will be the delight of heaven to realize and which, even now, fills with ecstasy the saints and angels.

This consecration of our humanity extends marvelously to all the ordinary and commonplace actions of life which the Word made Flesh has done for our instruction and salvation. Toil, which was for ages an

ignoble thing, the penalty of the Fall and the compulsory occupation of slaves, is now ennobled since the hands of Christ hewed wood and drew water and were busied for many days with labors. Whatever God has touched is sanctified, and so food and sleep, the refreshment of conversation and the solitude of thought, the mart and the desert have become full of holy memories to him who sees Christ among the crowds or in the lonelinesses. Friendship, compassion, mercy, justice, have been sublimed and glorified because God has shown to us examples of these things. Nay, little human traits and emotions, weariness, trouble of soul, anxiety, depression of spirit, He has sweetened and sanctified all these because He has suffered. Himself to undergo them all for love of us and for our consolation. The world is a different world, our humanity is changed and sublimed, every human being is lifted to a new importance and dignity because God has walked on earth a man.

But there were certain relations of life which the God made Man wished in an especial way to consecrate and lift up in the

esteem of the world for the good of all and for the carrying out of His merciful designs on human kind. The whole great and tender kingdom of womanhood as distinct from manhood, of the mother, the wife, the daughter, the cloistered virgin and the woman in her home, needed pitifully to be lifted up from the contempt into which it had fallen and to be consecrated and given an example whereby all ages should be lit with the glory of a Christian womanhood no less than with a manhood after the model of Christ. An awful degradation had fallen on the woman of pagan nations, and even among the chosen people of God woman was held in small esteem, and her state called down the pity of the Most High. The Word made Flesh took unto Himself the state and nature of a man. There was, then, need, so far as the design of the Most High may be said to have need of any creature, of a Woman who would give to women a model and an example which might interpret to them and convey to them that ennoblement and dignity of their state and nature which was

theirs by reason of the Incarnation of the Word of God.

Looking with all-seeing and foreseeing wisdom down the ages, God found such a woman in the Virgin, our Mother Mary, and to her he assigned the most extreme honor, responsibility, and consecration that have been or ever shall be given to any mere creature. He anointed her in the counsels of the Godhead to be the Mother of the Word made Flesh. She was to have, in her own person, all the supreme dignity which womanhood might gain from the mystery of the union of God with humanity. She was to be, in that sweet sentence never too often repeated, the Daughter of God the Father, the Mother of God the Son, the Spouse of God the Holy Ghost. She was to remain forever a virgin, while becoming the Mother of the Most High, was to unite, in her exalted humility, every resemblance of her divine Son, every unction of the Holy Spirit, every trait of faith, hope, love and service to the Father which God Himself could desire in His Mother. Most beloved of the Infinite Love, most encompassed by the cares of the Infinite

Wisdom, most cherished in the counsels of the Father, this shining and spotless virgin was to show to the world all the deeps of holiness, the heights of dignity of womanhood, and by the unutterable sanctity of her consecration she was to ennoble her whole sex and bring the selfish and stiff-necked race of men to bow in lowliness before a mother holding her child, a virgin cherishing her son. Thenceforth merely to know of the Virgin Mother Mary was to have in one's heart an epitome of all of the dignity, holiness, virtue, sweetness and strength of womanhood as God Himself conceives it. For is it to be thought that Uncreated Wisdom, choosing from all eternity His own mother according to the flesh, with His choice unbounded and omnipotence and omniscience for His choosing, should have selected any but a woman who fulfills the very ideal of womanhood that is in the mind of God?

In the Virgin Mother, then, behold the personal consecration of all womanhood forever, a woman who is the exemplar of her sex because she is so perfect and ideal a follower and image of Christ her Son, who is the ex-

emplar of mankind. Enthroned on the altars of the Church for all ages, written in her liturgy, carved in her cathedrals, chanted in her hymns and enshrined in the loftiest pages of her doctors, theologians and saints, behold the figure of a woman cherishing her child. This masterpiece of God's own invention, this pinnacle of mere creatures, this paragon of mankind is forever a concrete object lesson of the beauty and dignity of womanhood, a showing forth of the mind of God concerning woman, a lesson of her majesty, an instruction of her capabilities, a supreme example of her preciousness in God's designs, a warning to her oppressors, a rebuke to those who held her lightly, an everlasting consecration of all that is holy, glorious, and powerful in woman, here seen in its unique and wonderful extreme in her who combines all the states and prerogatives of womanhood in a way that it needed the ingenuity of the Most High to conjecture and His omnipotence to bring to pass.

Maidenhood is forever consecrated in her who is forever a maiden yet God's mother. Motherhood is sanctified in her who has the

Infinite for son. Perpetual virginity has its best patron in her, the ever-virgin, and she is besides the model of faithful spouses, keeping the house of Joseph all the days of her married life with an industry that was as perfect as her prayer. Contemplation and womanly reserve find their model in the maiden of the Annunciation, when in the quiet prayer of her own small room she hears the message of an angel, and when her *fiat* draws down the Most High to be her Son. The fearless courage of valiant women has the inspiration of her example as she hastens through the mountain country to her cousin Elizabeth or walks near her agonized Son in the way of the Cross. The grief of all mothers is summed up and consecrated in the sorrow of Mary standing in agony at the foot of the Cross; the joy of all motherhood is sanctified and sublimed in the joy of the Virgin Mother of Bethlehem whose curving arms enshrine the Desired of Ages.

Every age of womanhood is made lovely with pure and holy associations by the life of the Mother of God. Yonder little lass, with a face like a flower, tripping early to

school and singing on her way, recalls the small Maid of Israel who went to be presented to the temple. Her school days have sanctified the school days of all Christian girls, her fresh innocence has cast a holiness about the tender innocence of all children. The maiden

> "*Standing, with reluctant feet,*
> *Where the brook and river meet,*
> *Womanhood and childhood fleet,*"

reminds us, in her rosy youth, of the Virgin of Juda, whose snowy purity and meek lowliness won the heart of the Most High to choose her for His virginal spouse. That most touching of human sights, a young mother with her babe, leaning above him to protect and cherish, or holding him in her encircling and sheltering arms, recalls most vividly the Mother and her Child. Even the declining years, when mothers see their sons depart or die and are left alone with memories, are sanctified by the recollection of the Mother of God, for the Fathers of the Church lead us to think that she dwelt with St. John at Ephesus until a ripe old age,

The years left her virgin beauty untarnished who had no part of her own in that sin of which the punishment is old age and death; but still she bore all this long exile and separation from her sole delight.

Thus she has gathered to herself all the loveliness of womanhood and left it tenfold more lovely by her consecrating memory. She has removed the stain and the reproach that dwelt with the name of woman since the fall, and restored to her sex that primacy of innocence, that light of honor which it was to have by nature and in the designs of God. She has rendered so sacred the innocence of maidens, the chastity of consecrated virgins, the dignity of mothers, that, to those who know her and who love her, womanhood, so sorely outraged, so terribly degraded, is become the center of pure thoughts, the impulse to high devotion, the safeguard against what is base, the personification of what is chaste, tender, holy and refined.

To realize what influence this single Woman has had upon the standing of her sex, consider for a moment what woman was

in art, in literature, in family life and before the law, during the ages that preceded the Christian era. A jest, a plaything, a pretty trifle, the light and inconsequential possession of her father when she was young, of her master and husband when she grew mature—this was the milder and the more endurable part of woman's lot. With this contrast woman as she is in Catholic art and letters, in the Christian home, and in the law that is inspired and directed by Christian principles. There is one influence that has brought this liberation, the consecration of womanhood, to be, and that is the influence of the Blessed Mother of God. With the Most Beloved Woman enthroned in heaven and on earth, with the Mother of God offering her divine Child in her arms for the adoration of the ages, it is impossible for womankind to remain despised and degraded. She alone by the soleness of her eminence, by the singleness of her glory, avails to lift up her whole sex and change the laughing contempt of pagan culture towards women into the reverential worship of Christian chivalry.

Over the whole world, over every age of the world, in all climes, among all nations of the earth, there rises the image of a Woman carrying in her arms a Child. Around these two, inseparably united, shines a light most lovely and most human, yet not of this world but of heaven. In the image of the Madonna, the dearest of all women, humanity and womanhood, freed from the primal curse and from the degradation of that first and most deadly sin of woman, the dignity of maiden, wife and mother is consecrated and enthroned forever. As Christ gives to all mankind the dignity of being brothers and sisters of God, so Mary communicates to all women the glory of being sisters to God's mother. In her, motherhood and maidenhood, the double crown of women, meet and are glorified. Is it not with justice that all generations cry out to that singular Virgin, "Blessed art thou among women!"

HER SERVICE

THERE are two great ways of service by which a man or a woman may be of enduring benefit to our race—the service of word and the service of deed. Great words, moving words, that express the worthy aspirations of the heart of man, formulate his sublime desires, crystallize and keep in gleaming beauty and sparkling clearness his best and most glorious thoughts, such words are in themselves great deeds and form a permanent achievement, a lasting contribution to the riches of the soul and mind of man. To have uttered such words is a sublime service to humanity. They go echoing down the ages, crying forth from the dull covers of books, haunting human memories with thoughts of nobleness and power and enriching generations with their spiritual largess. The eloquence of the soul, human heart speaking to human heart, knows no limits of space or time. A great word, once uttered and remembered, partakes of something of the undying youth of truth itself

and survives, endures, leaps from mind to mind, from memory to memory for generation after generation.

Therefore the speakers of great words are honored among men with a singular reverence and gratitude. The prophets of old have the reverence of those who speak the hidden things of God. The evangelists who uttered the great words which God gave them to utter have the honor of bringers of the Good Message. The Doctors of the Church who, in their grand and simple way, gathered up and set forth in clear and moving human speech the mighty truths of the Church's treasury of revelation, are honored with especial honor as speakers of the word. Even in profane letters honor to whom honor is due for the utterance of the age-long beauties and glories of perfect speech. The philosophers of old, Plato, Aristotle, the great poets, Homer and Hesiod, Sophocles, Euripides, the givers of excellent laws, Solon, Pericles, and all the long line of servers with the word, from that rosy dawn of Greek thought to our own day, Dante, Shakespeare, and their numerous company, have honor be-

cause they spoke greatly for the welfare of all after time.

But over and against this noble company of servers with the word there are the servers with deeds, whose hearts and characters expressed in action have enriched all time. Some of them have been servers with words as well, and have made after days resound as much with their speech as with the silent eloquence of their deeds. But all of them have spoken most convincingly by their actions, because if great words are a sort of deeds so, too, great deeds are most powerful sort of words that cry down the years with a persuasive eloquence. Their actions are goodness made articulate, and their example speaks to our hearts with a conviction and persuasion that speech cannot come up to. When the past speaks stirringly to us its voice is the sum of the great deeds we know of, the noble characters of old using either the direct language of words or the silent utterance of great deeds to move and inspire us. Again, those who speak mightily to the ages often owe the strength of their inspiration to the deeds of those who have not

spoken. The great authors from the beginning have got the power of their speech from the humanity about them and before them. They utter what many hearts have felt and many minds have thought before their own, and the grandeur of their conceptions is often borrowed from the deeds they have witnessed or have heard of before.

Thus the service of deeds is more mighty and more essential than that of words. Character has changed the course of ages and improved the world more than eloquence or poetry. What one *is* avails more than what one *says*, and even the mightiest speech owes its influence and derives its power from deeds. Merely by being what they are and acting according to their heart and character, the greatest of men and women have made the world better and holier. One sees this very clearly in many characters of history, most clearly in the greatest character of all history, the Saviour of the world. More than all other men together, He has served mankind by His words, for His teaching is indescribably precious and altogether necessary and indispensable to salvation. No other

man ever spoke as this man and the sum of His teaching is the New Testament of God to men, whether written in the Scriptures or kept in the tradition of His Church. Yet His deeds are still more precious than His words, and His example speaks more movingly even than His teaching. He is most eloquent when silent in Bethlehem, silent before His accusers, silent in the agony of the passion, silent upon the cross, where, with the eloquence of love and suffering, He speaks to sinners and to saints, throughout all time.

It is so, too, with His blessed Mother, the imitator of His perfect life. She, too, has served the world with words. The celestial hymning of the Magnificat rings everlasting, stirring the hearts of men, the sublimest song of praise and exaltation, the supreme expression of humility and gratitude to God from the lips of the most exalted of mere creatures. It was she also who saved for all generations those precious incidents of the first dear days of her Son's life on earth, telling them to St. Luke that he might embalm them in the clear amber of his gospel,

those words that she had kept in her heart. The coming of the angel, the going to visit and to minister to old Elizabeth, the journey up from Galilee, the birth of the Child and the laying in the manger, the shepherds and the Magi, and the multitude of angels, the circumcision, the presentation, and that faring to Jerusalem when they lost the Boy and found Him again in the temple. It was the mother's heart of Mary that kept all these words and gave them to the evangelist for our everlasting comfort and delight. We should be pitifully poor of tidings of the precious, early days were it not for the kept words of Mary. Still her deeds were an unutterably greater service than her words. By being what she was she has made all generations her debtors and what she is speaks with far greater eloquence through the years than all she said.

One finds some few famous women through the ages. Here and there in the story of nations one comes upon names of women honored greatly for what they have done for their people or for mankind. The Old Testament preserves the stories of wo-

men who rose gloriously to the call of duty or of opportunity and wrought heroic deeds or spoke undying words for God's chosen people. Judith was such a one, so also was the mother of the Macchabees, and Anna the mother of Samuel, and Debora the prophetess and Ruth and Esther. But these were rare exceptions to the common lot of women, which was obscure, lowly, and in subjection to the daily round of household cares. So, too, in secular history one comes on some rare instances of great service rendered to the world by women, whether in word or in deed, but these, too, are the vast exception to that general rule which gave to men the leadership of the world and made it unlikely that even the greatest minds and the finest spirits among women would exert any widespread influence or achieve any notable service beyond that gentle sway which some Jewish women exerted at their own hearth and that politic dominion which the women of the gentiles sometimes achieved by their intelligence or their charms.

Who, then, would have dreamed, surveying the past experience of mankind, that

there would come into the world a woman who, by what she was and by the irresistible influence of her own personality and example, would more powerfully influence all after ages, more definitely change social ideas, break down bad customs, and implant great ideals than any individual in history save only the Son of God Himself? Who could have conjectured that it would be a woman who should be second on the altars of the Church after God Incarnate, second in the hearts of the faithful after the Saviour of the world, second in service and achievement after the supreme Benefactor of mankind, elevated above all other mere creatures, and loved and honored with a singular devotion, whom all generations should forever called blessed, not only for the gifts which the Most High had showered upon her, but for the sublime service which she had used these gifts to render to God and man.

Singular proof of the wisdom of God and the folly of men! Astonishing and convincing instance of the power of example over words; of the excellence of the influence of

goodness, the power of innocence and of love, of doing and being over the mere force of speech! Among the great intelligences and strong wills of the ages there has been a mighty strife for fame and for supremacy. Men, and women too, in immense numbers have spent weary lives striving for fame, for enduring influence, for the gratitude and the esteem of their fellow men. The power of words and of deeds has been wooed and wrought upon to gratify the desire of these eager hearts for service and for honor. In lifelong planning, unremitting effort and weariless desire these men and women have built up the fabric of their fame and influence, only to see it wear weak with their declining years, crumble with death, and leave only a memory and a ruin for the pitiless centuries to make sport of and toss to dust. Out of the centuries rise mighty mausoleums, the last effort of kings to achieve undying influence and fame. The letters have crumbled from their inscriptions, and antiquaries come to wonder and conjecture in what age and among what nation this forgotten monarch lived.

Then, in a most obscure nation, among a despised and oppressed people, from a royal stock, indeed, but fallen into poverty and oblivion, there is born a maiden upon whom both earth and heaven may well look with breathless expectancy. On her is put the loftiest responsibility, the sublimest office to be given in God's designs to any but His only begotten Son made man. She is to render both to God and to men the greatest service asked of any except the Saviour of mankind. Hers is a tremendous destiny and an opportunity at once unique and appalling. She is to be given graces beyond all other women, but heroic co-operation is required of her beyond what all other women must do and suffer. She will hear the voices of angels and hold to her breast the Divine Child, but Simeon's sad prophecy will pierce her and she must stand at last beneath the cross where her whole love and joy are crucified.

How did she achieve all that was set before her? How did she, a young maid, work out so perfectly all the vast designs of God and give to heaven and earth a service un-

matched by all women in all history? How did she come to a fame that is young and living when all monarchies have fallen to dust, and that keeps her in the hearts and on the lips of men two thousand years after she has gone up into heaven? The answer puts all human prudence to shame and justifies the ways of God. By entire humility, by complete confidence in God, by the perfect submission of her will in all things to His and the unending and unfathomable love which was the motive of all her actions, Mary, Mother of God, has surpassed in service and in honor all the great ones of old and the great ones still to be. God "hath regarded the humility of His handmaid, and behold from henceforth all generations shall call her blessed."

Here is an immense consolation for all humble souls, a justification for those who renounce the great things of the world to serve Almighty God. Here is the wisdom of God made manifest to men and the prudence of His counsels of self-renunciation, of meekness and lowliness of heart made clear in all their efficacy and power. At the

summit of service, first benefactor of the whole earth after her Divine Son, stands the meek and lowly maiden of Israel whose whole life was passed in obscure labors and in hidden suffering and prayer. Her rare and precious words drift down the ages; repeated by the lips of the evangelists of her Divine Son, but not in these are her greatest praise and honor. All generations call her blessed for her humility, her love of God, her perfect conformity to His will, her fidelity in those greatly important little things of life which, well and holily done, make great and perfect days. At the summit of all mere creatures in dignity and in service stands she who has epitomized all her character, her mission, and her greatness in the swift and perfect answer to the angel's message: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Out of the mouth of the little ones has come wisdom. God has chosen the weak to confound the strong. The supreme praise and greatest reward of service have been achieved not by lords in their might nor sages in their ponderous wisdom, but by a little maid in an humble cottage, fulfilling perfectly the per-

fect will of God, herself a poem, a work of divine art, a deathless philosophy in action, the loveliest of copies of the most lovely and holy of mankind, she who has ascended all Christian altars and been yet more dearly enshrined in all Christian hearts because her whole life was fidelity, love, and perfect service of God for His own sake and that of her fellows for the love of God.

THE WAY OF WOMEN

"I AM the way and the truth and the life," said our Blessed Lord; "no man cometh to the Father but by Me."

This saying shall stand until the end of time. There is one Exemplar of holy living given to the whole world, who is the Wisdom of the Father, having taken flesh to dwell amongst us and show us the path to God's justice and to His heaven. There is one way in which all must walk who would journey to everlasting glory, one truth to which all must hold who would possess the increated Truth in His fulness forever, one life whereby all must live who will have life eternal in the mansions of His Father. No man, no one of all the race of Adam cometh to the Father in earthly justice or in heavenly glory save through His only-begotten Son who is made flesh, so that all flesh may see salvation. Our perfection then, as the Imitation with a host of other spiritual works reminds us, lies in following the simple and lovely precept to imitate and follow the example of the Son of God. Perfection,

which puzzled in its elusive pursuit the most profound of pre-Christian philosophers, which perplexed in its details even the holy men of Israel before the coming of Christ, is now made visible, sensible and easy of comprehension to even the simplest of us all. The Word has become Flesh and has walked among us. Men and women like ourselves have seen Perfection in the Flesh, have walked with Him, spoken with Him, and watched with immense eagerness and faithful memory His words and deeds, and they have handed down to us such exact teachings, such clear precepts and precise examples from Him, that the perfection which He taught, most certain and secure because it is of God Himself, most imitable because it is given by one of our own flesh and blood, is put, so to speak, into our hands and we can see and feel what God would have us imitate for our salvation and for His glory.

Yet our human weakness, given a model so perfect yet so appealing, so utterly conformed to the holiness of God and yet so perfectly suited to our human condition, desires yet one thing more to help us to fol-

low Him. We desire not only to see Him whom we are to imitate but to be shown how to imitate Him. We yearn to be convinced, not that He is to be followed, for that we have on God's own word and our hearts' witness saying to us, "come, let us follow Him," but that it is truly in our personal power to follow Him closely. He walks before us and is perfect, but we would see some mere creatures like ourselves following perfectly after Him. Nothing gives us more courage and confidence in walking in His footsteps than to see others of our own flesh and blood following after the Word made Flesh.

God, therefore, in His pity and kindness, knowing that we need to be shown how to follow as well as to be shown the way, has raised up for us all one entirely perfect follower of His Son. One instance has been given us of a mere creature like ourselves who has most worthily and fully followed the way, possessed the truth, achieved the life, and come in all the fulness of grace and glory to the Father through the Son whom He has sent. In this consummate follower

of Christ, this perfect imitator of the perfect Exemplar, we have a guide and an encourager who can show us how Christ is to be imitated, demonstrate to us that it is not beyond the power of our human nature helped by God's grace to walk in the way, achieve the truth, possess the life in all the fulness that God desires.

To us all, therefore, the Virgin Mother is the supreme encourager and guide in the perfect imitation of her Son. Her example is full of reassurance for us, her very image reminds us of Him of whom she herself is the living image. She, being a mere creature like us, made herself so like unto the Son of God that even were she not His mother she would still remind us of none but Him and of Him most perfectly by her extreme resemblance to Him. Most children take after and resemble in some sort their mother. This Mother takes after, and resembles in a marvellously perfect way, her Child. One mere human being has then achieved the most perfect resemblance to the Word made Flesh, and though we can never hope in this life to come so near to Him as

does His immaculate Mother, still the very fact that she has so perfectly and gloriously succeeded is of good omen to us, and makes us hope that in our kind and our degree we also shall achieve a glorious likeness to Him.

But it is to womankind in particular that the Most Beloved Woman is supremely a benefactor in showing them how to imitate her divine and perfect Son. For the Word chose according to the will of His Father to become a man, and, perfect in all things, He is in all things full of a holy and Godlike manliness. His ways are the ways of a man, His thought, His speech, His manner of acting, the spirit and method of His teaching, the works of His public life, all bear the firm imprint of a manly character. Now it has been well observed that in the character of every fine and noble man there is something of the woman, and that in every noble and perfect woman there is something of the man. The one has the delicacy of feeling, the fineness of nature that is characteristic of women, the other has the strength of purpose, the steadiness of will that we are accustomed to associate with men. This is true,

but the very comparison points also to great differences between the sexes. The manly and the womanly nature are designed by Almighty God to supplement and complement each other, and so there are essential and radical dissimilarities between them. Men are strong and women are tender. Men are bold, women yielding and retiring. Men find their most congenial sphere of action in public life, in the rush of affairs, in struggle and effort; women, with rare exceptions, long for more peaceful ways, prefer the quiet of a home, shrink from overmuch stress and conflict, are happiest when they are ministering to children and the old, not fighting for place or pushing a cause.

In most things, then, the terms we apply to men and to women are not quite univocal, their virtues and their qualities are not precisely of the same temper and the same meaning. Courage in woman means a different thing, though not a less glorious thing, than in a man. So also does affection, sympathy, devotion, strength, wisdom, prudence, generosity. It is true that in other things, in purity, faith, charity, they are on

equal terms. But we look for traits of womanliness that would be out of place and sometimes unbecoming in a manly character, and for touches of manliness which would be strange and out of place in the character of a perfect woman. So, though the example of Christ is as much for women as for men and His sublime teaching strikes to the tender heart of the maiden as surely as to the strong heart of a man, it was a merciful and considerate condescension to the especial exigencies of womanhood that God should give to all women a model so entirely their own. In this exalted Woman, chosen and approved by God Himself and full of the excellencies peculiar to their sex and at the same time so perfectly an image of the Word made Flesh, they have at once a guide and model, that they may see as it were at a glance how to imitate the Man-God completely while at the same time keeping completely within the meet sphere of their womanhood.

The poet says neatly though not quite truly: "Woman is the lesser man, and all thy passions, matched with mine, Are as moon-

light unto sunlight, and as water unto wine." It is the saying of a man for the moment out of patience with womankind and seeking to bring out the difference between the heart of man and of woman in a bitter figure, which makes the heart of woman not only different from but inferior to that of man. Because she is milder, gentler, and more tender by nature and in feeling woman is not therefore less strong and noble than man. Hers is a subjection which brings her rule, a lowliness and service which implies control. "As unto the bow the cord is, So unto the man is woman. Though she bends him she obeys him, Though she draws him yet she follows." All controversies therefore concerning the superiority of either sex should come to rest at last in the simple truth that manhood and womanhood both in nature, in intelligence, the qualities of heart and of soul are neither one inferior nor superior to the other, but in so far as nature gives to men an eminence of strength, the headship of the family and therefore a greater dignity.

Yet when one speaks of Our Lord and His Blessed Mother this comparison of the

poet, stripped of its bitter meaning, becomes luminous and lovely. Many a devout worshipper of the Mother of God has dwelt delighted upon her virtues under the image of the moon, which gives back with a changed and gentle luster the mighty radiance of the sun. Travellers in southern climates love to tell of the brightness, the clear and silver beauty of the moon in those limpid skies. Swimming large in the heavens, the tropic moon pours on the earth such a torrent of white radiance that the world becomes visible again almost as at midday, but it is a different and transfigured world. The bright colors of day are softened to silver, the firm outlines of midday are touched with the dimness and vagueness of the dawn. In some such way does the fair Mirror of the Word give to the world the very light of her Son, but softened to the silvery radiance of the heart and soul of woman. It is His very light, the pure and unchanged ray of the Light who enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world, but it is reflected from the mind, the will, the feelings, the emotions of the most perfect and womanly

of all women, who thus interprets to her sex all the fair teaching of her Son, and shows them a world of thought, feeling and action, a sphere of willing suffering and doing, which is the same world indeed that is made manifest by the Sun of Justice, but with its colors softened to their conception and its outlines traced for the comprehension of their hearts.

Thus the Christian ideal has two perfect models, the one, the great original of all holiness and Justice, who is God Himself made man and walking amongst us that we may see and hear and understand from the example of a God in what the perfection and dignity of our human nature consist; the other by the most perfect imitator and follower of Christ, who at the same time gives to all mankind the lesson how He is to be followed and interprets for her own sex the Christian character. Jesus is the Source of Light, the True Light that enlighteneth the world, and Mary, the consummate Mirror of the Light, who sheds upon the world the self-same ray, caught in the bosom of a mere creature like ourselves and poured forth again unimpaired.

When the sun has set, and the skies purple with dusk, the moon swims to sight in the east like a new sun of the night and rises to the noon of midnight, giving to the world a memory and a trace of the light that is concealed. But again, when it is day, who has not seen the moon hiding itself in the brightness of the heavens, a pale watcher and rejoicer in the brilliance of that sun from whom it has borrowed all its beams? So, too, the Most Beloved Woman, borrowing all her light from her Beloved, shines upon us to remind us of the true Light of the World, and then conceals herself in the brightness of the Source and Well-spring of her splendor. So, too, does she shine forth for the glory of all womankind, giving to the earth a gleaming and convincing proof of the majesty of womanhood and to her sex a light and guide to the imitation of her Son. Then she hastens to lose and hide herself in the radiance of His light, the watcher of and rejoicer in His sole and singular glory who is the way, the truth and the life for all ages to man and woman, Jew and Gentile, bond and free.

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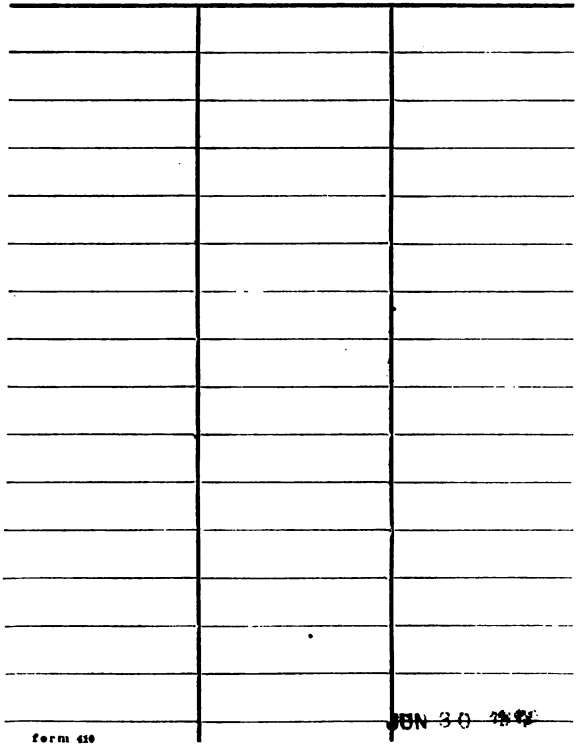

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